

## Flip Derry Upside Down by drakarifire

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Canon-Typical Violence, Child Abuse, Crossover, Explicit Language, F/M, Homophobic Language, M/M, Past Child Abuse, Period-Typical Homophobia, Period-Typical Racism

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Billy Hargrove, Bob Newby, Dustin Henderson, Eddie Kaspbrak, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Georgie Denbrough, Henry Bowers, Henry Bowers's Gang (IT), Jonathan Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Hanlon, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Patrick Hockstetter, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Robin Buckley, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris, Steve Harrington, Wentworth Tozier, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Wentworth Tozier / Karen Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Derry, Maine has never been the best place to live. Sure it looks nice on the surface but there's a lot of hate here, a lot of anger and violence. With summer on the horizon every kid in Derry is itching for two months of freedom. It's a summer just like every summer before...until Will Byers and Georgie Denbrough go missing.

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aka a stranger things/IT crossover and I suck at summaries.

# 1. I'm a castle wall

## Author's Note:

Hello!

So this is my nano for this year. Surprise! I've never done a fanfic for it before, and I've never actually won, but I've had this idea knocking around in my head for the past MONTH. Why am I posting it on here you ask? Well, that's my strategy this year. My goal it to reach my daily word count and post what I have at the end of the day as a new chapter. So if you can, try to keep me honest, you know?

Just a heads up that this is for nanowrimo so these are largely unedited chapters written usually in one go. So forgive me if there's any major spelling or grammatical errors. I promise that when November ends I'll run through the whole thing again and make corrections. Until then...I hope you enjoy. This is kind of my second fanfic like ever, and the first time I've tried anything that wasn't a one-shot so like, be gentle with me.

The summer of 1989 brought a dry heat to the small town of Derry, Maine. Roads cracked under the oppressive weight of the afternoon sun, the air thick as ocean waves. It was a stark contrast to the near monsoons of the months before as the flooded banks of the Kenduskeag receded. In the grand scheme of things it was like every other summer that had come before. The heat and the crackle of anxious energy as the children of Derry buzzed at the prospect of impending freedom, was familiar. It was only in the smaller, personal confines of individual lives that the summer of '89 was beginning to pull itself away into unknown territory.

It started with Beverly Marsh.

Derry for all its quaint and quiet small town aesthetic was simmering with barely concealed vitriol. Whispered words hissed in school

hallways and rumors scrawled on bathroom stalls had become a familiar soundtrack for Beverly's life. Slut. Whore. Dirty Bitch. She'd heard it all and trained herself to school the expression on her face, to not let anyone see her cry. Not like the first time. Even when Greta Keene and her sneering minions cornered her in a bathroom stall she didn't let herself show anything but mild disinterest. Green eyes half lidded in a thin veil of boredom as she pressed her cigarette to her lips.

It's been so long she's not sure when the rumors started, or where they came from. Trying to deny them only piled them on higher. Derry was small, tightly packed and boiling with barely suppressed anger and resentment. It was kind of like the writing on the bathroom stalls was its own kind of cancer. Her name tied to a dozen boys she'd never so much as glanced at. She didn't consider herself particularly imaginative, not really, but when she's perched on the edge of a toilet trying to forget she couldn't help but picture that ink spreading outwards. The words blanketing the stall, then the bathroom, zooming through the school's hallways and classrooms, before laying across Derry like a shroud. Until it wasn't just girls like Greta looking at her like she was dripping in every unspeakable thing, but adults too. Teachers and parents.

Today was different. She shouldn't have come to school.

There was a tremor in her fingertips that hadn't gone away even with the nicotine in her system. Her eyes rimmed in red and a purple bruise spreading angrily across the left side of her face. She should be running. Hiding. Taking the money she'd stolen from her father's wallet and doing something with it. A bus ticket maybe.

She wondered if she'd killed him. If he was still lying on the floor of the bathroom right now. Bleeding.

Her hand was shaking so hard she missed her mouth twice. Her eyes blank and unseeing. She'd stopped wondering why her father was the way he was. Stopped trying to remember when he'd been kind or gentle, when his hands hadn't hurt and his voice hadn't made her skin feel dirty. If only she could cut it off as easily as she did the hair he touched.

Coming to school had seemed logical when the adrenaline was still coursing through her. All she had to do was grab her backpack, hop on her bike, and go. It could have been just any other morning. Any other day. Except she didn't know if her father was dead or not. She didn't know where she'd go after this.

"Beverly Marsh?" She'd been spiraling so hard she hadn't heard the door open. The vaguely familiar voice of the school's assistant principal echoing in the room around her and making her entire body freeze.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Ms. Marsh?" It was too late not to tuck her legs into her chest and pretend she wasn't here. Too late now to do anything except put her cigarette out on the stall beside her and suck in a shuddering breath of air.

"Y-yes?" She flinched at the crack in her voice, teeth biting into her bottom lip.

"I need you to come with me." There was a soft rap of knuckles on the stall door. Light and tentative.

Beverly didn't want to go. Her eyes shut tight and her hands clenched into fists in her lap. The cigarette but discarded beside the toilet. Get it together Bev. She tried to remember the face she'd cultivated these past few years, the facade she'd built around herself like unscalable castle walls. Slowly, with that shielding hugged tight around her like a blanket, she got to her feet and stepped out of the stall.

The school's assistant principal was a woman, tall and slender with a hard bird-like face. A hooked nose and steely grey eyes made her seem like a vulture just waiting for Beverly to drop dead at her feet. Except that she was smiling and it was soft and sad, and when she spoke- offering a hand out, it was like she was talking to a skittish horse.

"Come with me." She said, and Bev didn't see any other options. She couldn't run. Not with how hard her knees were shaking anyway. So she let the woman take her hand and guide her out of the bathroom

to the principal's office.

Part of her was sure. Was terrified. That her father would be standing there waiting for her. She could already picture the anger burning like fire in his eyes, the tight line of his mouth and hard clench of his jaw.

Are you still my little girl Bevvv?

It made the instinct to run so much harder to ignore as they approached their destination. Her feet dragging, heels digging just the slightest bit against the linoleum. If the woman pulling her along noticed she didn't say anything or rush her. Simply held her hand a little tighter and kept guiding them forward.

She'd been in the principal's office more times than she could count. Usually for being caught smoking somewhere on campus. She knew her way there and she knew the layout of the room before they even stepped through the door. She knew that the principal would be sitting at his desk, hands folded. She expected all that and she expected her father.

It never occurred to her to think the police might be there. Her entire body jolted like an electric shock as Sheriff Hopper turned towards the door as they entered. Something like anger flashing across his features as his eyes landed on her face. Oh God. Oh she's fucked up. Her dad was dead and now she was going to- going to-

The sudden flood of terrified thoughts were cut off as abruptly as they started when a woman pulled her out of the vice principal's grasp and into a tight hug. Instinctively Beverly froze, growing as still as a statue in the unexpected affection. Uncertainty and confusion flooding her features as her eyes took in the faces of all the adults in the room. What the hell was happening?

The woman holding her pulled back, holding her at arm's length and bending slightly to make them eye level. "Oh honey..." she whispered softly, one hand moving to hover over the bruise on Beverly's cheek, brows knitting together.

"Beverly, can you sit down?" Hopper spoke up, clearing his throat and gesturing to one of the chairs in the room. His gaze moved to the

principal “Could you, uh, give us a minute?”

“Yes. Of course. We’ll be right outside.” The man got to his feet, giving Beverly a nod before guiding the assistant principal out the door.

Which left Beverly alone with the Sheriff and the strange woman.

She hadn’t moved from where she’d been standing. She felt too much like a deer caught in the headlights, frozen in place just waiting for death to hit her fast and hard. It was the woman who finally led her to the chair and helped her sit, her hands quickly moving to brush a lock of orange hair behind Beverly’s ear.

Hopper settled on the desk across from Beverly. He watched the exchange between them before clearing his throat, and nodding in Beverly’s direction. “Did your dad do that to you?”

Beverly’s hands flew to her face unconsciously and she winced as her fingers touched the still too tender skin. Instinct told her to say no. The word was right there, on the tip of her tongue. It wouldn’t be the first time she’d lied about it. I fell. I tripped. I got hit by a ball. It was an accident. All the old excuses were piling up too fast in the back of her throat, clogging her lungs and keeping her silent.

Something in Hopper’s face told her he wouldn’t believe her even if she did lie. The way he looked at her now it was like he could see every excuse as it clamored on the tip of her tongue. Could see right through them to the truth behind each one.

“You don’t have to protect him anymore. He’s never gonna touch you again.”

“You’re safe now Bev.” The woman was speaking now, and her hand was resting over Beverly’s, thumb rubbing a soft pattern against her skin.

“Wha- what?”

Was it hope or fear she could feel pounding in her chest?

Her eyes moved from one adult to the other, blinking up at them

with uncertainty. She had to swallow before she could speak the next words and even then they were so quiet, a barely there whisper. "Is he...did I..."

"No, no sweetie. You didn't." The woman's hands moved to touch her face, gentle fingers brushing over her uninjured cheek. "He's in the hospital, but he's never going to touch again, okay?" She smiled, "You're coming with me."

Bev's brows furrowed, her gaze flicking over the woman's features like she was trying to spot something familiar in them. Some reason why this stranger would want to have her- dirty, slutty Beverly, in her home. She'd seen her around school before. She was almost sure that she was Will Byer's mom, but she couldn't be certain. Not really.

"Joyce I don't think she knows who you are..." Bev's eyes shifted to Hopper, who was looking at her with a mix of concern and something else. Anger? She remembered the spark of anger from before but now she understood it a little better. He wasn't angry at her. He was angry at the bruise on her face, at her father.

Joyce looked pained at that realization, like it physically hurt her to see Bev's face and not have some sort of recognition shining back at her.

"You're Will's mom right?" Bev said cautiously, shifting in her seat. She was uncomfortable under all this scrutiny. She never thought she'd miss the bathroom stall with all its insults but she almost wished she could be there right now. If only to stop people from staring at her.

"Yes honey, I'm Will's mom." Joyce smiled softly, "But I'm-" she sucked in a breath, sitting back on her heels from where she'd been kneeling on the floor. "I'm your aunt. He- he really didn't say anything?" Her brows stitched together, "He didn't mention me at all?"

Bev tried to think, wracking her mind for mentions of any other family. After her mom passed away her father had essentially cut them off from the world. If she ever asked about anyone- about grandparents or cousins, or any other family. He'd tell her they were



dead or non-existent. The fact that she an aunt, and one that actually lived in Derry, whom she'd seen around town more than once...was a shock. "No." She shook her head, "He said he didn't have any family, and that mom didn't either."

She didn't notice that her hands were clenched tight around the skirt of her dress again. The grip tight enough to turn her knuckles white and the fabric barely enough protection to stop her nails from digging into her palms.

Joyce sighed, her head bowing for a moment. She seemed to notice the death grip Bev had on her own clothes, and gently pried her fingers loose from the fabric. Holding both her hands in her own. "I should have tried harder to come see you." She said with a soft sigh, meeting Bev's eyes again. "I never thought-"

"Don't Joyce. Don't go there." Hopper was on his feet, shifting closer to them. "It's not your fault your brother's a rat bastard."

He shifted, groaning a little as he went down on his knees beside Joyce, offering Bev a reassuring smile. "Look kid, that goes for you too, okay? What happened? Not your fault. You did good, I've been wanting to clock your old man since high school." He reached out, seemed to consider patting her arm, before changing his mind and resting his hand on Joyce's shoulder. "Your aunt here, she's gonna take you in. You don't have to worry about your dad anymore."

Up until this point Bev had been in shock. She'd likely been in shock since this morning when her dad had pinned her to the floor of their home. Now, here, in the wake of all this kindness and warmth she could feel her walls involuntarily crumble. Everything she'd tried so desperately to hide came tumbling out. The tears she'd been keeping to herself for the last few years burned their path down her cheeks, her shoulders shuddering with thinly controlled sobs.

Joyce's reaction was instantaneous. Her arms were around Beverly in a moment, pulling her from her chair and letting her curl up in her lap on the floor. "Shh, shhh it's okay honey. It's okay." Bev could feel kisses pressed against her hair, arms warm and safe around her shoulders. "You're okay now. I've got you."

For the first time in a long time...Beverly Marsh felt safe.

## **2. comfort on both sides**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Joyce and Hopper take Bev to get her things.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Woot! Okay so I'm kind of behind on nano, had some school stuff come up that got me distracted but I'm determined to catch up today so there'll probably be another chapter posted later in the evening.

A note about the chapters: since I'm posting when I hit my word count for the day, the breaks might seem a bit off and incoherent. I apologize for that. As an example this and the previous chapter would have probably been combined into one.

Hopper walked with them to Joyce's car and although Bev was glad to have them flanking her sides, she couldn't help but be silently grateful that the rest of the school was still in class. The last thing she wanted was to be seen with a police escort leading her down the hallway. Her body instinctively folding itself smaller every time they passed by a classroom.

Joyce had signed her out of school for the day, one hand resting gently on her back to guide her forward. Holding the passenger side door open so she could climb in. "We're going to stop by your apartment to pack some stuff, okay?" The fear must have been clear on her face because Hopper placed a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"I'm going to follow in my car and be there the whole time kid. Don't worry." He offered a smile, reassuring and kind.

It made something in Bev's chest feel light and airy. The fear that had been coiling in the pit of her stomach loosening in the wake of her own smile. The gesture felt odd on her face when it was genuine. Like her muscles weren't used to the soft spontaneity of it. "Thank you." She might have stopped crying but her eyes still felt dewy and wet,

and there was a quiver in the tone of her voice. Bev found she kind of didn't hate the soft looks of sympathy aimed her way for once.

Once she was in the car the sheer weight of her nerves finally seemed to register. She was still in shock, still expecting to wake up somewhere- the bathroom stall, the floor of their living room, anywhere that wasn't here. Even watching Hopper load her bike into the back of his truck and feeling Joyce pat her hand lightly before telling her to buckle up felt like some kind of fever dream. Everything cloudy at the edges and idealistic like a fantasy she'd been too scared to let herself have. The part of her that had learned a long time ago to distrust most adults felt not unlike a scared rat skittering anxiously between her ribs. This was a lie, it hissed. They were lying and she was going to the police station, or the hospital, or wherever it was that her father was waiting with that cold smile on his face.

"I don't have an extra room but Will can share with Jonathan and you can have his. I'm sure he won't mind."

Bev almost missed what Joyce was saying. Her eyes had wandered to the houses that passed by as they drove, mind wandering and thoughts growing increasingly more panicked the closer they got to her home.

"Bev?" Joyce's hand reached out, gently touching her arm, glancing away from the road for a moment.

Bev hated that she startled, head whipping away from the window a little too quickly, eyes feeling too wide on her face. "Huh?"

"You okay?" Joyce's question was spoke in a tone that said she knew the answer already but was going to ask anyway.

"Yeah. Yeah I'm okay." Bev felt herself smiling and hoped that it was genuine enough. Knowing almost instantly that it wasn't by the flash of sadness that was there and gone in Joyce's eyes.

"If you're sure hun, just- know that I'm here okay? If you need to talk."

"Thank you." It was all she could think to say and this time she

hoped that at least the smile on her face was somewhere in the vicinity of genuine. At the very least it seemed to appease Joyce enough to get a nod and a soft smile of reassurance before she was focused once more on the road ahead.

Beverly isn't sure what she thought it'd feel like to see the slate gray walls of her apartment complex looming in front of them. The smell coming off the canal making her nose curl as her hands clenched tightly in the fabric of her skirt. She realized with a knife-like sharpness in the pit of her stomach that she'd never expected to come back here again.

Joyce seemed to sense her anxiety, or noticed the tight clench of her hands, because as soon as the car was off she was pulling her into another hug. Gentle reassurance rubbed into her shoulder blades, strength whispered into her ears. "You can do this honey. We'll be right here the whole time."

Climbing out of the car and walking up the steps to her apartment door had never felt so monumental before. Like weights the size of school buses were strapped to each of her ankles. Hopper and Joyce were as patient with her here as they had been at the school. Neither of them rushed her, even when she stood on the threshold of her door and stared in abject horror at the bloody handprint smeared along the doorframe. It was Hopper who placed himself between her eyes and all that red, angling his body to guide her into the apartment while attempting to shield her from the worst of it. The blood footprints on the carpet, the shattered vase ( her mother's she thought with a pang of sadness ), and overturned kitchen table.

She wouldn't find out until later but her father had pulled himself off the bathroom floor in a blind rage. He'd torn the apartment apart looking for her as though she'd be stupid enough to stay within these four walls after doing that. Once satisfied that she wasn't hiding from him in their own home he'd stumbled out of the apartment and onto the street, bellowing her name and throwing punches wherever he saw fit. She's not sure if it was the crack to the head she'd given him or if he'd finally snapped, but the cops were called and after a brief fight with them he was hauled to the hospital for his injuries and handcuffed to a bed. All the while yelling for his daughter and insisting he was going to "Strangle the little bitch." Hopper called

Joyce and well...here they were.

Her room was a disaster.

She should have expected that he'd tear it apart. She's not sure why she was expecting it to be like she'd left it that morning, as though he'd preserve it like a shrine. The mattress was flipped, her desk chair was broken, papers and pictures were strewn and torn all across the floor. The keyboard she kept against one wall was broken nearly in half, and her clothes were thrown all over the floor some of them torn. She wanted to cry...but mostly she wanted to throw up as her eyes landed on her open underwear drawer.

Knowing he'd gone through her things wasn't nearly as bad as knowing he'd gone through there.

Unconsciously her hands moved to cover her mouth as though her shaking fingers could keep back the sob that itched at the back of her throat. She's pretty sure she'd have collapsed entirely if it wasn't for Joyce's arm suddenly wrapping around her waist offering support. She vaguely felt Hopper move away, but it was a distant thing. A faraway sound like the apartment was infinitely bigger than it was, stretching on forever and ever behind her back. The sound of a chair scraping in the dining room and the gentle press of hands guiding her down onto also felt far away.

"I'm going to get you a glass of water." Hopper's voice was a low rumble of thunder from a far off storm. Calm and soothing.

Joyce moved to crouch down in front of her, and for a moment it was almost like the principal's office again. It helped. Somehow. Like distancing herself from this space, from the bathroom down the hall where she knew...where there would be blood still staining the tile floors.

Gentle hands touched her face, brushed her hair back from her eyes, as a kind smile peeked up at her. "You just sit here okay? We'll get your things."

Beverly isn't used to feeling so soft. It had been so long since she'd openly cried like a child in front of an adult. Years since she'd let herself fall apart like this, crumbling into herself and pressing her

hands against her face as her shoulders shook.

She didn't want to be here. Suddenly the world around her felt too tight like the walls were closing in on her shoulders and the air was getting pulled out of her lungs. It took everything she had not to start gasping for oxygen and focus instead on the cool touch of glass pressing against her hands, urging her fingers to curl shakily around it. Joyce offered support, her own hands cupping Beverly's to give them strength, while simultaneously guiding the glass up to urge her to drink.

"Breathe." Joyce said, calm. "In and out honey, that's it."

For a moment nobody moved. The only sound in the apartment was Joyce's constant, whispered reassurances, and Beverly's stuttering breathes. She might have forgotten Hopper was there if his presence wasn't so physically there. A solid wall of strength at her back like a guard keeping her safe from anything that would try to sneak up on her.

When they finally did start packing her things, Bev found she couldn't bring herself to care about much of anything that was left in the room. They put whatever clothes hadn't been torn into a bag as well as any books her father hadn't destroyed. There was a necklace that belonged to her mother hidden in a dark corner of one of her drawers and Bev was silently glad that the thin gold chain was still there. In the end they could only salvage two bags of her things and Bev couldn't help but think they looked sad sitting in the backseat of Joyce's car like that.

She didn't glance at the bathroom the entire time they were there. Not once. A monumental task considering she could feel it lurking in the peripherals of her vision like a specter.

It was a relief to step out of that oppressive apartment. To feel the weight slipping off her shoulders and take in a breath of fresh air with something like hope in her heart. She's not sure how she knows, it was kind of like one of those things that tickled at the back of your mind, a sense of déjà vu you couldn't quite shake. Like this was right and she was meant to be here. She was sure- absolutely positive, she wouldn't be stepping foot in this building again.

The drive to the Beyer's home saw even more of her anxiety melting away.

"Now, we don't have much, but I can see about getting you some more clothes. The boys are pretty quiet and keep to themselves mostly so you don't have to worry about them." A chuckle, "It's going to be nice having another woman in the house at least."

"Yeah, for me too." Bev felt herself chuckle, then she paused, her eyes watching the trees flit past as they rounded into the driveway. Words on the tip of her tongue, teething worrying softly at her bottom lip. "I...thank you." She turned towards Joyce, brows furrowed in concentration. "For taking me in..."

The car had stopped at some point, Joyce's house- Bev's home now, sitting in front of them. A squat little one story home, run down but as far as Bev was concerned it might as well have been heaven. Beside her Joyce was turning in her seat, shifting so they could better face each other. The movement was enough to snap Bev's gaze away from the house in front of them and towards her aunt.

How weird was that? Her aunt.

It made her smile.

"You don't have to thank me." Joyce's hand came up to press lightly against Bev's uninjured cheek. A soft touch that the younger girl couldn't help but lean into. "Just know that this your home for however long you want it to be." Her thumb brushed lightly back and forth and Bev realized somewhat belatedly that she was wiping away tears.

With a sob, Beverly Marsh launched herself into Joyce Beyer's arms and cried because someone cared.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

All the losers deserve to be happy and I'm going to give it to them gfdi.



### 3. ganged up

#### Summary for the Chapter:

the bower's gang causes some trouble.

#### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm so late with this chapter but I kept getting stuck on what I wanted to do for it.

I finally just made myself push through with my original idea and hopefully I can catch back up on my daily wordcounts x.x

tw: henry bowers t b h

Richie Tozier was taking the front steps two at a time. Obnoxiously patterned Hawaiian shirt billowing around his torso as his chucks slapped heavily down on the sidewalk. "We should go see Big Bill tomorrow." He spun, thumbs hooking into the straps of his bag. "You know, make sure he hasn't slammed his head through a wall out of boredom."

"We can't go see Bill, Richie. He's sick." Eddie was standing at the top of the steps, face scrunched up at Richie. Both Richie and Stan recognized it as the 'I'm about to go on a rant' look, and sure enough Eddie's words sped up drastically, hands gesticulating wildly. "Do you know what my mom would do to me if she found out I went within fifty fucking feet of a house with a sick person inside?! I'd be quarantined for months. Not to mention the dangers of viral and bacterial infections-"

"Jesus Christ Eds. He has the flu not the fucking plague."

"You don't know that!"

Richie's expression fell to something that roughly equated to 'Really?' before he leveled it in Stan's direction.

"If we don't go see Bill can we at least go to the arcade or something? I really don't want to be home." Richie huffed, sending a loose pebble

skittering with an indignant kick. "Mike and his nerd friends are gonna be hogging the basement playing their dumb dungeons and dweebs game."

Eddie shrugged, "Dungeons and Dragons isn't that bad asshole. It looks kind of fun actually."

Richie made a sound that was somewhere between horrified and disgusted. "Eds you're disowned. Mrs. K and I will not stand for such deviant behav-"

"Beep fucking Beep *Richard*."

"I think seeing Bill is a good idea." Stan finally spoke up, making his way down to Richie's level and edging towards the bike racks. "We can give him his homework and stuff."

"I want to cure his boredom not cause it, Stanley."

They'd taken their time making their way out of school, meeting up in the hallway from their separate classes so they could walk out together. Their dynamic somewhat shifted and vaguely uncomfortable without Bill's presence. Not in a bad way really, but just like...they didn't know how to stand in relation to each other. It was always the four of them together or paired off in random groupings of two. Never three. Three felt weird and it had been three for a few days now because Bill had been sick in bed for almost the whole week. It made Richie overcompensate and he knew it; twice as loud and three times as obnoxious. Like he was trying to fill the space Bill left behind which was...impossible, because it was Bill. You can't replace Bill with anyone but Bill himself.

They'd taken their time though, walking slowly through the halls despite Richie's very real and pressing need to shoot out those double doors like a bottle rocket. His palms practically itching with the desire to get as far away from school and everything it represented until he was forced back here Monday morning.

It was a survival tactic though.

The end of the school day meant that Bowers and his gang of

dumbasses was prowling like a pack of starving wolves. Going slow and taking their time meant that there was a chance, albeit a small one because Henry Bowers seemed to have a sadistic hard on for their group in particular, that some other poor kid would catch his attention first. Sure it didn't exactly make any of them feel good but they were just kids. Kids who didn't want to get their asses handed to them every single fucking day.

Eddie could appreciate going slow though if it meant he avoided being jostled by the hordes of his sweaty, germ-laden classmates. He'd told Richie as much one time while they'd stood on the front steps trying to figure out their plans for the day, not unlike they were doing now. Something they might not have been able to do with everyone trying to run them over on their way home.

"I think my mom is picking up Georgie tomorrow and taking him and Holly to the park." Richie said somewhat offhandedly, "That means Bill is going to be extra bored." He gave Eddie a pointed look, "C'mon you can spend the whole time bitching at him about how to get better, isn't that like the same as sex for you or something?"

Eddie scoffed, features twisting in disgust. "Why are you so gross? Stan why is he so gross?"

"They found him in a dumpster as a baby."

"That's right ba-by!" Richie struck a pose, one foot going up a step, hands on his hips and chin jutting out. Voice shifting into a caricature of something you might hear on a radio show. "Trashmouth! King of the Dumpsters!"

Eddie didn't even hesitate before taking a step down and shoving Richie hard enough he lost his balance. Arms helicoptering futilely he went down on his ass with an unattractive yelp.

"Oh shit!" Okay so Eddie hadn't actually expected Richie to fall, but he was a second too late in his attempt to try and catch the other boy's flailing arms. "Rich are you okay?" He practically hopped down the rest of the steps to scramble to Richie's side.

Richie for his part was trying not to cry because his tailbone had hit

the ground just right and it fucking hurt. One hand rubbing his ass and wincing while the other lifted to flip Eddie off because he didn't really trust his voice right that second.

Beside them Stan was watching all of this play out with the neutral expression of someone who'd seen something so often it stopped registering. Eyes faintly glazed over, half focused on his friends and half eyeing the middle distance where a flock of birds was perched on a telephone wire.

"Fuck Eds now how am I going to keep up with your mom tonight? You know she likes me when I'm in top form."

"Ugh! Fuck off Richie!" Another undignified yelp from Richie's direction. This time because Eddie had been trying to help him up only to drop him back down the second he'd opened his mouth. "Keep talking about my fucking mom and I swear I'll kick you in the face dipshit."

Stan sighed.

"Are you guys done? I want to leave before Bowers comes looking for us."

The mention of their school bully seems to sober them up pretty quickly. Both Richie and Eddie fall silent and there's a moment of fear that flits across their faces, barely there and gone again in an instant. A little more subdued, their argument brushed aside for now, Stan and Eddie pull Richie to his feet and make their way to the bikes.

For some reason none of them feel particularly compelled to hop on just yet. They're silent, walking their bikes in a huddled group of three, an arrow without a point since Bill isn't there to lead the way. They don't really make it past the school building before the sounds of a scuffle has them all instantly on high alert, heads swivelling towards the side of the school at the familiar sounds of Henry and his goon's obnoxious laughter.

There's a silent conversation as they all lock gazes with each other. A quiet: *It's not our problem. We should run. Let someone else deal with*

*Bowers*. Before curiosity gets the better of them and they're rushing forward to try and get a look at the unfortunate souls that managed to catch Bower's attention.

Richie instantly bristles.

Instinctively Stan and Eddie try to box him in, keep him back, but Richie has already dropped his bike and swerved away from them to sprint up the grass.

"Richie!" Eddie yells, scrambling after him. "Don't be stupid!"

Eddie's yells draw the attention of the group huddled in the shadows of the school building. Eight sets of eyes, half fearful and half predatory, swivel to focus on Richie stalking forward. Patrick Hockstetter has someone pinned against the wall so high their feet are dangling above the ground, Victor and Belch have cornered two others laughing as they lunge forward and the smaller boys flinched back in fear. Richie's eyes however are on Henry Bowers and the bully knows it by the slow, methodical sneer that spreads across his features.

It can be argued that Richie is an idiot. Sure he's got good grades and he's not stupid, but he does things without thinking more often than not. Like right now. He's not thinking as he plants himself squarely in front of Bowers, hands clenched into fists at his side. At his back, sprawled on the ground and nursing his jaw, is Richie's twin brother. Identical if it wasn't for the coke bottle glasses that make Richie's eyes three times their actual size and the glaring difference in their wardrobes. Richie looks like he tried to get dressed blindfolded in the dumpster of a thrift store. Mike dresses like an *adult*, all nice slacks and neat button-up shirts.

"Fuck off Bowers!" And he's squaring off against someone who he knows for a fact, from personal experience, could snap his body like a twig.

For all his bravado he knows what reaction he's going to get before it happens. The four older boys break out in hysterical laughter like a pack of hyenas. As much as Richie is always fishing for a laugh this is most definitely not one of those times and he tries real hard not to

flinch at the grating sound of it.

“Richie.” Mike says from the ground behind him and there’s a hint of warning in his voice.

“What you gonna do Tozier?” Bower’s sneer makes Richie think of a psycho killer from the movies. Freddy Krueger maybe, or like an actual shark. “Do you see this boys?” Bower’s gaze flicked over to Patrick then back to Richie, the sneer never wavering. “Little faggot Tozier’s got some balls.”

When Henry laughs this time Richie can’t keep himself from flinching. It rakes up his body like claws tearing their way down his spine.

Before he can stop himself, before he can process a thought other than *shutupshutupshutup*, his fist is connecting with Bower’s face and all hell breaks loose.

There’s a split second where Bowers is stunned, head snapping to the side from the momentum. The moment feels like an eternity and yet like no time at all because it’s over in the time it takes for Richie’s heart to beat once. He knows that because he can feel the stutter of that heartbeat all the way down to his toes, and he’ll feel it well into the next day, just like the bruise that’s going to be forming on his face.

Richie hits. One second. Bowers strikes back.

It’s so fast, a blink and you’ll miss it moment, but Bowers is bigger and stronger. Richie’s hit barely stuns the larger boy, while the one he receives in return brings a spout of blood from his nose and knocks him on his ass for the second time that day.

“Richie!” Stan and Eddie’s voices are ringing somewhere far away.

“How dare you fucking touch me you disgusting piece of shit?!” Before Mike can reach for his brother Bowers has his hand fisted in Richie’s hair and is yanking him upwards.

Richie cries out. He’s already crying from the pain blossoming across his face, so it doesn’t take much to elicit a sob out of him. He hates it,

and he does his best to communicate that with his eyes once he has the ability to open them again. They're watery and he's pretty sure he's lost his glasses because he suddenly can't see shit, but he hopes at least that the pure vitriol and hatred he feels is coming through anyway.

It seems like it is because he hears Bower's spit in his face before a glob of something thick and disgusting smacks across the bridge of his nose.

Fuck.

He doesn't think again. Just goes for it.

His hands come up, wrapping tightly around the wrist whose fingers are digging into his scalp. Wishing he didn't bite his nails down to the stub so he could leave marks because he wants Henry Bowers to remember this. Even if it's going to get him killed.

He's already half up off the ground, it doesn't take much to get his feet under him. Aiming is a little harder considering he can't see anything but the vaguest of blurs, but he does his best and tells himself it's the thought that counts if he does manage to miss. Cocking his leg back he doesn't hesitate, swinging it forward and up right between Bowers' spread legs.

The scream he hears is better than any rock song he's ever heard.

God he wishes he could see the fucking look on Bower's face right now. Fuck he'd take pictures. Frame it. Make posters of it and plaster it all over the walls of the Aladdin.

"I'M GONNA FUCKIN' KILL YOU!" Henry roars and there's something high-pitched and off about his voice.

For a second Richie thinks he just might, and a part of him is ready. He kicked Henry Bowers in the balls. He thinks he'll be okay if that's his legacy in this shit town. Sure he doesn't exactly want to die, but if he has to go at least he managed to take Henry's balls with him.

"Do you even still have the balls for it?" And he can't help but cackle

because he's fucking terrified and it's making him a little ( a lot ) crazy. His face is in agony, his fist hurts, his leg is vibrating like a tuning fork.

He can't help but picture himself taunting the Grim Reaper because that's exactly what this feels like.

Richie waits for the inevitable. For a second he actually feels rough hands wrap furiously around his throat. He panics. He feels like a rabbit trying to escape the slaughter. Henry lifts him up off the ground just enough that all he can do is squirm and gasp for air. This is it. He's done it. Goodbye Trashmouth we knew thee well.

"Shit! Henry, the principal's coming!"

And just like that he's dropped like a sack of potatoes. The air whooshes out of him and the world spins dangerously on the wrong axis.

"This isn't over Tozier." And there's a hard kick to his hip that makes him cry out, before he can hear heavy footsteps sprinting further and further away.

"What's going on here?" A decidedly adult voice rings out, and then because this is Derry and sometimes even adults who care seem to hit a wall that stops them from caring too much. The principle looks them all over, arches an eyebrow, and shakes his head. "Don't let me catch any of you fighting on school grounds again. Go home."

Richie hears him leave and he doesn't realize he's been gasping for air until Mike, Eddie, and Stan are huddling around him.

"Breathe like a normal person dumbass." Eddie's words do absolutely nothing to hide how absolutely terrified he sounds.

"Tha-that's rich coming from you." Richie wheezes, and then winces because Stan's sliding his glasses onto his face and while he's glad he can finally see again, his nose is if not completely broken- at least bruised.

"What the hell Richie? Are you stupid- no. You know what? You are." Mike's started in on him now, glaring down at him with his face



scrunched up angrily. His lip was busted so it looks like they'd both gotten clocked in the face. "You are literally the stupidest person in this entire town. Congrats."

"Dude, Bowers is going to kill you, you know that right?" Lucas was stepping forward.

"That was awesome!" Dustin was beside him, a wide grin on his face. His hands fixing his hat back onto his curls after Belch had knocked it off his head.

Richie forced himself up into a sitting position, eyes closing to see if that helped the world stop spinning. It didn't. "If I die it was fucking worth it."

"Guys we should go." There's a very strong quiver in Will's voice. "I-I really don't want to be here in case they come back." He winces as he moves and Richie wonders just how hard Patrick slammed him against the wall.

"He's right." Stan says, and then focuses on Richie, "Can you get up?"

"Yeah I can get up *Stanislav*. He didn't break my fucking legs." He goes to push himself up, remembers with a sudden jolt of pain that he got kicked in the hip, and falls back down again. "Okay. Well- maybe I can get up...with help."

Stan doesn't say anything, though Eddie is muttering under his breath at a speed even Richie can't follow, as they help haul him to his feet. He hobbles, but manages to walk regardless, and with each step the pain ebbs just a little bit more.

"I can't believe you did that." Mike grumbles, and bumps his shoulder against his brothers.

"You owe me."

"For what?! Getting your ass kicked? Insuring that Henry will be out for blood all summer?" He swivels, eyes narrowing into a glare. "I'm pretty sure he's not going to give a shit which Tozier he gets his hands on first. So thanks."

“Just think of it this way: I kicked Henry Bowers in the balls for you. That’s like a prime big brother move.”

“We’re three minutes apart.”

“Good enough.”

“Mike’s right you’re a fucking dumbass.”

“It’s true.”

“I thought it was cool.”

“Me too.”

Richie glared at his friends. “Stan, Eds. I’m replacing you with Dustin and Will, sorry.”

“For the last goddamn time stop calling me that!”

Eddie went to slap him on the arm, saw the blood coating Richie’s face, and the bruise blossoming by his eye, and thought better of it. Instead he huffed and sped up back towards their bikes. It wasn’t exactly routine for the two groups to stick together. They hung out at different places and therefore took different routes home, but there was a silent consensus among them as they climbed onto their bikes. Richie and Mike’s house was safe and being in a group gave them a miniscule sense of security. Sure it hadn’t exactly done them any good just now, but at least while they biked in formation they felt almost like nothing could touch them.

For now that was good enough.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

aye, twinsies.

## 4. don't tell mom

### Summary for the Chapter:

nancy is not pleased.

### Notes for the Chapter:

hi yes i love nancy wheeler/tozier. u-u

i almost kept going with this chapter, but i wanted to post it before i second guessed myself and scrapped anything.

Turns out that riding a bike after you've been hip-checked by Henry Bower's steel-toed boots is really fucking difficult. Richie doesn't need to look to know that there's likely a giant bruise already forming in his skin. He always bruised easily even when he wasn't getting the ever loving shit beat out of him.

On a normal day he could ride circles around these dweebs with the exception of Bill and Silver. So the fact that he was visibly struggling wasn't lost on the group around him, even to his brother's friends.

About halfway home Mike shifted to match his speed which wasn't hard. Richie wasn't really trying and they had the same bike and their legs were the same length. Plus it was easy to keep up with someone that was wobbling like a drunk. Silently, Mike reached out, setting his hand on Richie's handlebars and tightening his grip until he was holding the bike steady. It was a throwback. Something they hadn't done since they were kids, back when they'd been learning to ride together. Riding side by side and holding onto each other's bikes to keep steady.

You could pry soft and sappy emotions from Richie's cold dead

hands, but this was Mike and they might be opposites but they knew each other's faces well enough. Richie didn't have to say shit, a slight bob of the head easily construed as him bracing against the wind or something equally not *soft* .

A silent thank you.

The twitch of a smile at the corner of Mike's mouth.

"I still can't believe you fucking did that Richie. What the hell were you thinking going up against Bowers? I swear to god I'm going to tell Bill-"

"Eds Spagheds, take a breath will yah?" He huffed, even with Mike holding his bike steady his hip and the whole side attached to it were screaming. "Also Bill's not my fucking mom."

"Shit!" Mike hissed and for a second both their bikes wobble until Mike gets them back under control again. "I forgot about mom. She's probably home by now. She's gonna freak when she sees you Rich."

"Fuck." Richie winces. He doesn't need a mirror to guess what he looks like. He can feel the dried blood smeared across his face from when he'd tried to wipe Bower's spit off his skin. The already sore beginnings of a bruise under his eye. Even if he did manage to clean himself up without mom seeing there was no way in hell the bruises on his face or Mike's split lip won't go unnoticed. "Think she'll believe the really rough game of dodgeball story again?"

Mike rolled his eyes, “Probably not.”

“Just tell her the truth.” Stan said simply, the wind rustling his curls back from his face. He looked kind of effortless coasting along beside them and Richie was a little jealous. His hip really fucking hurt.

“What that a sadistic personified asshole in a mullet likes to beat the shit out of me? Yeah no thanks.” He squared his shoulders, fingers white-knuckled in the handlebars to fight the pain. “She’ll call the school or something and try to get Bowers expelled. Then I’ll really be dead.”

“I *meant*. ” Stan’s voice sounded like he was running on the last dredges of his patience and wanted them all to know it. “Tell her you were being stupid. Which you were.”

Richie’s mouth opened to object, already preparing to yell at his friend, before he paused and tilted his head considering. “You know. That’d probably work. Huh.” Then he tossed his head in Mike’s direction, “Alright Stan the Man if I was being stupid what’s Mike’s excuse?”

“He’s related to you.”

Eddie, Lucas, Dustin, and even Will all snort as Mike yells out an aggravated “Hey!”

“For the record that’s a stupid idea Stan.” Eddie pointed out, still

fighting back a laugh.

“I know. I just wanted to call Richie stupid.”

“I gotta tell ya Stan, I’m not really feeling the love here.”

There was a small smile on Stan’s face one that Richie recognized. Stan didn’t have very many facial expressions- he had emotions but he kept his face relatively neutral most of the time. Unlike Eddie who was an open book or even Bill who struggled, especially with his frustration. Stan was quieter, more reserved, but even with his sharp teasing Richie got the hint that he’d been worried back there. Sure he was calling Richie stupid but it was more like a fond ‘this is my stupid’ than any kind of insult.

By the time they reached the Tozier household Richie nearly collapsed the second he was off his bike. His legs wobbled and his hand moved to his side like that’d somehow stop the pain. He hadn’t been hit hard enough to break anything, he was almost sure about that, but riding his bike had only served to aggravate his injury pulling at the already bruised muscles. Mike and Stan were bracketing him almost the second they realized he might collapse, their arms slipping around his waist to support his weight.

At least he didn’t see mom’s car. Thank god for small favors.

They half dragged Richie in through the front door and the second they were through the threshold the fuse under Eddie’s ass seemed to have caught fire.

“Lucas go find a bag of peas or something in the fridge! Dustin there’s a first aid kit in the bathroom up stairs! Stan, Mike get Richie to the basement!” The commands were loud and fast, and both Dustin and Lucas actually had to take a minute before their brains caught up with what Eddie was saying. They weren’t exactly used to seeing Eddie like this, it made Richie grin.

“Will you guys keep it down?! I’m trying to stu- Holy fuck Richie what happened?” Nancy was bounding rapidly down the stairs, taking them two at a time. Her hands instantly flying to cup Richie’s face, turning him enough to see the bruise and making him wince.

“It’s nothing Nance, just a rough game of dodgeball, right boys?”

Nancy was not having it and seeing as Richie wasn’t going to give her a straight answer she turned to Mike instead. Only to notice the injuries on his face too, her lips pressing into a thin angry line as one hand rested on each of their faces.

“Nope. No. Stop!” Eddie was swatting her hands away and brushing her aside. For a second Richie’s unabashed fondness showed bright and shining across his features, because Eddie was in *doctor mode*. “Do you know how much bacteria is on the human hand? Millions!” He rounded his way to stand behind the three boys, pushing them towards the basement. “Richie’s probably already infected. Get down there. Go. I have to clean you up. You’ve got fucking Bower’s germs all over you. It’s probably giving you cancer as we speak.”

“Bowers?” Nancy’s head cocked to the side, expression contorting into barely contained rage. “He’s beating you up again?”

Richie snorted, throwing his head back enough so he could look back at his sister. "As if he ever stops. Really though Nance- this is nothing."

Lucas and Dustin brush past her down the stairs, following behind Eddie who's still going a mile a minute about infections and stories he's heard from his mother of people dying. ( Dying Richie! Do you know how serious that is?! Do you? Uh yeah Eds. If I died then I can't bone your mom anymore and that's a tragedy. )

For a second Nancy just stands at the top of the stairs feeling something akin to shell-shock. By the time she snaps out of it and makes her way downstairs Mike and Richie are seated on one of the couches and Eddie's dragged the coffee table as close as he can get it so he can sit cross-legged in front of them.

"Keep the peas on your hip Rich and stop whining like a baby." He's got the first aid kit on his lap and is shifting through the contents.

"Your wish is my command Dr. K." Richie winked, Eddie sputtered a half-hearted "Shut up."

"Alright boys. Spill. What happened?"

"Richie kicked Bowers in the dick!" Dustin exclaims, right before Lucas and Will elbow him in the ribs on either side.



“You *what* ?!”

“Now you’ve gone and done it.” Lucas muttered.

“I take it back Dustin, Mike can keep you.”

“Richie! What did you *do* ?” Nancy was rounding on him now, and Richie couldn’t help but flinch whether it was from the look on her face or because Eddie was lightly dabbing at his skin with alcohol wipes was really up in the air.

“Nothing! Bowers is just an asshole. He’s always an asshole, so what’s new.” He grumbled, and was rewarded for it with a light slap on the knee from Eddie.

“Stop fucking talking while I’m cleaning your face.” Eddie’s gaze leveled on Nancy as if daring her to ask another question.

Her hands lifted, palms out in surrender, before turning her attention on Mike. “Alright, you’re not going to get my head bitten off so spill. What happened?”

Mike groaned, letting himself fall back onto the couch. “Bowers and his goons corned us outside the school.” He gestured at his friends crammed onto the other couch. “Richie saw and..well, he’s Richie.” He shrugged head turning to look at his brother, focusing on the injuries littering his face. “He got between me and Bowers and got his ass handed to him.”

“Um fucking-s’cuse me?”

“Richie.” Eddie growled, dabbing a little too harshly at Richie’s nose and making him wince. Up until then he’d been trying his best to be gentle, lightly tapping at Richie’s chin when he wanted him to turn in a certain direction.

The contact was so fleeting, barely a brush of fingertips, but it made Richie feel like his skin was on fire, or like there was a volcano churning somewhere inside of him. Bouts of burning magma exploding every time Eddie goddamn Kaspbrak so much as pressed a pinky to his cheek.

Richie glared at him ( like it was entirely Eddie’s fault that his body was betraying him ), and then over at his brother. Grasping for the distraction offered, and ignoring Eddie’s attempts to silence him or keep him still. “Sure I ended up on my fucking ass but I still managed to kick Bowers in the balls. I count that as a win.”

“Only because he didn’t get a chance to strangle you, idiot.”

“Boys!” Nancy’s fists were clenched at her sides, jaw tight and eyes darting from one to the other. They quieted instantly under her stare, both hunching into the couch and for a rare moment looked every bit as identical as the day they’d been born. “Mom is going to blow her top the second she finds out about this, you know that right?”

“You can’t tell her!” It was instant, shouted simultaneously.

Mike made to get up off the couch but Eddie leaned over to shove him back down. He glared at him for a second if only to wither under Eddie's gaze and turn back to look at Nancy. "Mom is going to call the school and make it into a big thing and then we'll really be screwed." He whined, hands fidgeting in his lap for a moment. "Please Nancy."

Nancy stood over them, arms crossed and gears whirring behind her gaze. "What's the lie this time?"

"Dodgeball?" Richie supplied hopefully, cracking a lopsided smile.

Nancy rolled her eyes. "Alright fine. I won't say anything." She huffed, her breath sending a loose lock of hair back from her face. "But if he comes after you again, and he will. I'm telling mom whether you like it or not. Got it?"

Richie groaned.

"Got it?" Nancy said more insistently, eyes narrowing in their direction.

"Fine. Fine. We fucking got it." Richie muttered, waving the hand not holding a bag of peas in his sister's general direction. Eddie had finished with him so he let himself fall back onto the couch and close his eyes. "Do we have Asprin?"

"Yeah, I'll go grab some." Nancy sighed, feeling the tension she'd been holding leach out of her. Her shoulders slouched casting one last, despondent glance at her brothers. Eddie had scooted slightly over on the coffee table, placing himself in front of Mike now and chastising him every time he tried to pull away from the alcohol swab in the smaller boy's hands.

The room was quiet for a moment after Nancy vanished up the stairs. All of them lost in thought and the only real sound being Mike's hisses of pain every time Eddie swiped at his cut. It was almost like they were too scared to talk until Nancy came back with some pills in her hand and two glasses of water. Handing them off to Richie and Mike she stayed long enough to watch them take the medicine before heading back up the steps.

"Mom went to pick up KFC so she should be back any minute now." She glanced down at the watch on her wrist then back to them, "She usually gets a ton of food so I'm sure she won't mind if any of you decide to stay. I'll be upstairs if you need anything." One eyebrow arched up slightly, pointing at Richie first and then at Mike. "Remember what I said. This is the last time I'm letting you lie about this."

"Yeah, yeah. We get it." Richie lifted his head up from the back of the couch, squinting his eyes in her direction. He'd let his glasses slip back into his hair and honestly couldn't be bothered to slide them back down again. "Thanks anyway Nance."

She smiled, small and strained, then turned and made her way back upstairs.

Oh, yeah she'd lie for them, this time...but that didn't mean she was

going to sit back and let Henry Bowers get away with hurting her brothers. Fists clenched so tightly she could feel the sharp pain of her nails digging into her palms, she turned to go up the second flight of stairs.

She had some calls to make.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

comments and kudos are always appreciated~

## 5. will beyer's fan club

### Summary for the Chapter:

just a bike ride home.

### Notes for the Chapter:

god i'm so behind on nano send help.  
i knew this chapter was going to be mostly filler, and  
i think that's why i got stuck on it??

the HOPE is that the next chapter is when things kick  
off for real, but we'll see.  
I know where i want this to go but there's so much  
SET UP before i can get there /lays down

“Proud of ya Eds, didn’t even reach for your inhaler once.” Richie flashed the smaller boy a lopsided grin from where he was still lounging back on the couch. The pain meds hadn’t taken effect yet but if he didn’t move then everything kind of just felt dull and even. He could handle that.

“Shut up dipshit. I was too busy planning what I was going to wear to your funeral.”

Eddie had scooched back on the coffee table so that he wasn’t balanced quite so close to the edge. His arms folded in front of his chest and fixing Richie with a look fit to curdle dairy. Eyebrows scrunched up and lips pressed into a line so thin they’d essentially vanished completely.

“Awww Spaghetti, you’d bring out your formal fanny pack for me? I’m touched.” Eddie had buttons you shouldn’t press, moments where he was hovering over the edge set to explode. Richie, for whatever reason, always felt compelled to slam his fists against those buttons like his life depended on it. “Don’t let your mom know she might get jealous.” He winked, then felt a pillow smack hard into his face. Eliciting an unattractive yelp of pain.

“Beep beep Richie.” Mike snapped, completely ignoring his brother’s cries, instead leaning over him to shove the pillow down more forcefully.

Richie struggles, nearly kicking Mike in the chest with how hard he’s flailing, but just as quickly as he started Mike stops.

“WHAT THE FUCK MICHAEL.” Richie’s voice is a screech bursting from him the moment the pillow is off his face, high pitched enough he could almost rival Eddie at his worst.

“Mike you’re supposed to be the calm one.” Stan looks like he’s hovering somewhere between disappointed and bored. His arm folded on the arm rest of the second couch, hand supporting his chin. “Not that I’m against smothering Richie, but at least wait till he’s asleep so we don’t have to hear it.”

“I should probably head home...” Will spoke up, face contorting slightly like he didn’t really want to leave.

Considering Bowers and his gang were still out in the world somewhere pissed off and hungry for vengeance, could you blame him? Especially with how out of the way his house was.

“I’ll come with you. My mom is gonna flip if I’m late for dinner.” Eddie glanced down at the bulky watch on his thin wrist. He didn’t seem too happy at what he saw there, huffing almost imperceptibly before letting his arm drop back to his side. Palms pressing flat against the table he turned and scooted off the edge to stand up.

“C’mon guys stay for dinner!” Mike straightened, eyes flicking to each face in the room.

Stan shrugged, “I have stuff to do tomorrow, especially if I want dad to let me go see Bill.”

Lucas and Dustin traded glances, seeming to come to a mutual consensus. “Yeah, we’ll stay.” Lucas said, before Dustin added. “Maybe we can sleep over, I mean we were planning on coming here tomorrow anyway.”

“Guuuuuys.” Richie whines, sounding not unlike a petulant toddler.

His eyes going between his two friends. "Stay! Don't leave me alone with these nerds all night!"

"Fuck off Richie, you have the highest GPA in this room." Eddie snapped.

"God only knows why." Stan muttered rolling his eyes, but getting to his feet nonetheless. "We'll catch you tomorrow Trashmouth. Try not to do get murdered while we're gone."

Will was already grabbing his bag and edging past Lucas and Dustin to follow them out.

"At least let me come with you guys." Richie was already attempting to get to his feet. One hand still gripping the bag of peas to his hip as he wobbled uncertainly like a newborn giraffe.

Eddie muttered an indignant sound, something just this side of threatening. Mike got the gist of it without having to look at the expression Eddie shot his way. Lazily, he tugged the back of his brother's obnoxious Hawaiian shirt, a muttered "Nope" leaving his lips as he dragged Richie back onto the couch.

"Fuck off-"

"Doctor's orders Richie. Plus you could barely ride your bike home, you're staying."

"But what if Bowers-"

"And what are you going to do dickwad? Shield us with your fucking face again?" Eddie's hands were on his hips now, feet planted apart. He looked like a challenge. One that had no qualms about punching Richie himself.

Richie pouted because what else was he going to do? They were all right but he wasn't about to say it. Deflect. "Nah Eds, I just want to play knight in shining armor so your mom does that thi-"

"Beep beep Richie." A collective shout from Eddie, Mike, and Stan that made Lucas and Dustin burst into unrestrained laughter. Will watching them all from the basement steps with a much more



subdued smile and muffled giggles.

“Tough crowd.” Richie muttered, but otherwise pressed his lips into a tight line and crossed his arms. He huffed conceding defeat, body slouching back on the couch, though his gaze remained focused on his friends. If there was a moment of open vulnerability shining through, no one said a word about it. “You guys be careful, okay? And like- call when you get home or whatever.” He grouched, finally letting his eyes fall to where his shoe was toeing at the carpet.

“Alright Rich.” Eddie said, adjusting the straps of his backpack before splitting his face into a grin he knew Richie would hear even if he wasn’t looking. “Trust me, I have no plans on getting murdered by Henry Bowers until I get a chance to hear Bill’s ‘disappointed Richie voice’ when I tell him what happened tomorrow.”

Richie groaned, closed his eyes as his head fell back onto the couch. Hand lifting to flash Eddie his middle finger as a response.

Stan, Eddie, and Will left the others to it. Not really surprised to find that Richie and Mike’s mom was home from her errand and the undeniable smell of fried chicken was permeating the house. She glanced up as they passed the kitchen, flashing them a smile as she straightened from adjusting Holly into her high chair.

“You boys staying for dinner?” She asked, gesturing to the literal buckets of food on the counter. The Toziers had a weekly dinner of take out on Fridays and both Karen and Went had subtly started going out of their way to buy a considerable amount more than their family of six could hope to eat in one night, which was already quite a lot of food considering the size of Richie’s appetite. It was as much of an open welcome to all of their children’s friends as if they’d drawn up formal invitations and sent them in the mail.

“Not tonight Mrs. Tozier.” Eddie said with a genuinely regretful smile. Knowing he had one of his mother’s bland, tasteless dinners waiting for him at home made turning down the invitation almost physically painful. “I promised my mom I’d come home for dinner tonight.”

The other two boys nodded, indicating similar reasoning. “Dustin and

Lucas are staying though. They're downstairs." Will said gesturing to the basement door.

Karen offered them a smile that was perhaps a little too knowing, especially when she directed it specifically at Eddie. "Alright, well you boys just get home safe okay? There'll be plenty of leftovers tomorrow if you want to stop by for lunch." Then, after a moment's consideration she plucked some napkins from a bag, fished out one of the boxes and deposited three still steaming biscuits onto each one. Taking them gently ( they were fresh enough to crumble ) she handed one to each boy. "To tide you over on the bike ride home." She said with a wink.

"Thank you Mrs. Tozier!" The three boys exclaimed in unison, and Eddie wondered if it was strange to feel as warm in his heart at the gesture from someone else's parent as the feeling of the fresh biscuit in his palm.

They said their goodbyes and even took a moment to stop and give Holly a high five on their way out the door. All of them quiet as they parked themselves beside their bikes and took their time savoring the food they'd been given. As much as Eddie would have loved to save it for later he knew that it'd only be rock hard and a sad memory of the deliciousness it was now. So he did his best to eat slowly instead, enjoying every small bite.

Will and Stan finished theirs well before him, but neither said anything to hurry him along. Especially when Will glanced at Stan and the other boy gave a slight, almost imperceptible shake of the head. Just like Mike and Richie's mom, he knew what was waiting for Eddie back home and wasn't about to rush him.

When he finished they crumpled up their napkins, Stan tossed them in the Tozier's garbage can by the garage door, and then they walked their bikes to the end of the drive. There wasn't really a lot of talking at the start of their ride. While they knew each other well enough to be comfortable they were all generally quieter in their own ways than their far more talkative friends. Sure Eddie could talk ten miles a minute once you got him going, but Richie was generally the one that sparked it and without his best friend to push his buttons he settled easily into silence. Stan was quietly contemplative more often

than not, used to watching silently like he did with his birds, than being the starter of conversations. And Will, well he'd only ever felt really, truly comfortable around his group of friends. Moments out of his comfort zone left him quiet and somewhat shy, chewing his bottom lip as he rode his bike.

At least until Eddie perked up slightly and directed a question at him. An admittedly, pointed question, because comfortable silence aside Eddie just didn't want to be quiet right now. Especially when he'd have the whole night to spend not talking to anyone. "So Will, tell me about your game? You guys are playing tomorrow right? At least that's what Richie said."

Stan shot Eddie a curious look, but Eddie just smiled and focused back on the road ahead of them. A smile that grew when he risked a glance in Will's direction in time to note the other boy's brightening features.

"Uh yeah, Mike made a whole new campaign for us." And just like that the shyness seemed to evaporate at least a little. Will sped up some to ride between Stan and Eddie, talking easily and animatedly about D&D, going over previous campaigns in such detail he might have put Bill's storytelling to shame.

For their part Stan and Eddie made good listeners. Nodding and adding questions, exclaiming at the really cool parts, and laughing hard enough their bikes wobbled whenever Will regaled a particularly funny story. In the meantime Will Beyers didn't notice that they'd effectively passed both of Stan and Eddie's houses. At least not until they'd moved passed the more populated parts of Derry and down the all too familiar road leading to his own home.

Once he did realize however, he stopped his bike growing still and confused eyes flicking from Stan to Eddie and back again.

"Will?" Stan stopped once he realized that the other boy wasn't following, or that Will's voice had stilled. Eddie stopped not long after, one foot dropping to balance his bike as he half turned in his seat to arch an eyebrow at Will. "You okay?" Stan said, head tilting.

"Didn't we pass your houses?" Will's gaze moved from one boy to the

other, his hands tightening white-knuckled on his handlebars. "Aren't your parents going to be mad you're late?"

Eddie huffed, but cracked a smile regardless. "Well yeah...but we weren't going to let you bike all the way out here by yourself with fucking Bowers on the hunt."

Stan shrugged, and nodded in agreement.

Sure it's not like either of them could do much of anything against him and his goons, but there was something to be said about strength in numbers. If not for the fact that it actually did something, then at least because it would offer some sort of empty sense of security.

"You guys didn't have to- I mean I could have-"

"It's no big deal." Stan waved his protests off. "We're almost at your house anyway, right? It's too late to do anything about it so let's just keep going."

The logic was sound of course and as much as Will clearly wanted to keep protesting, his mouth snapped shut and he nodded. All of Will's usual quiet coming back in full force, his realization putting him on uncertain footing. At least they weren't far from their destination. A mailbox announced the start of the driveway leading up to the Beyer's home, a place where Will fully expected Stan and Eddie to break off and turn back the way they came, but the two boys kept following. Riding with him all the way to his front door.

"Thanks guys." He said, and he meant it. The appreciation in his smile evident even as his eyes ducked down to fiddle with his backpack strap from where he stood on his front porch.

"Don't mention it." Eddie said, offering a beaming smile of his own in return. Still balanced on his bike he prepared to turn back around when the door to the Beyer's home flew open.

"Oh good Will you're home!" Joyce practically came flying out of the house towards her son, only to freeze at the sight of the two other boys on her front lawn. "Oh-" Her brows furrowed, and she glanced at Will "Are these new friends?"

“Hi Mrs. Beyers.” Stan said, offering a wave, and that smile he reserved for strange adults. The one that made Richie tease him. ( “You look like my old man when you make that face.” “Fuck off Toizer.”) “We’re friends of Richies, we just wanted to make sure Will got home okay.”

Joyce’s somewhat frazzled appearance instantly morphed into a wide smile, her eyes lighting up instantly. “Thank you.” And it was so genuine that Eddie and Stan didn’t really know what to do with the sentiment or the expression on the other woman’s face. They glanced at each other, before offering their own shaky, uncertain smiles back in return. It wasn’t that her response was off-putting, rather- it was such an odd sincerity to receive from a grown-up.

“Is that Will?” A voice answered from inside, before a girl with brilliant red hair peeked her head out the front door. “Oh-” Green eyes flicked from each face; Joyce, Will’s, Stan and Eddie’s, before offering a smile. “Um, hey.”

Joyce was the only one who didn’t seem at all stunned by the girl’s presence, or disturbed by the large purple bruise decorating her face. She just smiled at her, before turning to Will. “I’m glad you’re home, we’ve got some stuff we need to talk about.” She gestured for him to go inside, and Will was too confused to really argue. Stepping past Beverly with a curious look in the wake of the smile she flashed him as he passed. With her son inside, Joyce turned to direct her attention towards the two other boys. “Normally I’d invite you in,” she looked actually, genuinely apologetic that she couldn’t, “but it’s been a pretty hectic day and we’ve got some family stuff going on. Thank you again for bringing Will home.”

Stan and Eddie had to take a moment, feeling suddenly awkward and out of place on the Beyer’s front lawn. Like they shouldn’t be there, but feeling like it was too impolite to just haul ass in the opposite direction. Stan was the first one to snap out of his thoughts, straightening and shaking his head vigorously. Blinking his gaze away from the door where Beverly had long since vanished back inside. “It was nothing Mrs. Beyers, really!” He said, and he stumbled over his trademark smile a little sheepishly. “We actually should be getting home anyway.”

“Alright, well you two ride safe okay? People like to race down that road a lot.” Her chin gestured to the end of her drive, backing herself back into her house.

“We will!” Eddie finally spoke up, offering a small wave as he began turning his back around to head back out. He paused, glancing over his shoulder “Um, remind Will to call Mike later. Just so he knows he got home.”

Joyce smiled and nodded, “I will, thank you.”

Eddie nodded and he and Stan rode their way back up the Beyer’s driveway and towards the main road.

They were uncharacteristically silent considering it was just the two of them again. Normally they’d spend the time talking about the sort of things they’d get harped on by Richie or Bill for. School or Stan’s birds, or whatever fresh disastrous health fact Sonia Kaspbrak was hung up on next. The ride through the trees and back into the Derry suburbs felt shorter than the ride out had been, trees turning into houses, and houses turning into the familiar lawns of their neighborhood.

Eddie could see his house steadily approaching and he just couldn’t keep quiet anymore. The words tumbling out of him high and fast, “Was that Beverly Marsh?”

“I think so, yeah.”

“Well, fuck.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

this is a call for the will beyer's fan club. please sign your name so we can start this meeting.

## 6. home sweet home

### Summary for the Chapter:

some discussions in the beyer's household

### Notes for the Chapter:

SORRY THIS IS LATE and also that it's probably got  
typos up the A\*\*  
writing is hard yo

For the first time in his life Will Beyers didn't know what to do with himself in his own home. He'd listened somewhat distantly to the sounds of Eddie and Stan's bikes growing further and further away, if only to give himself something to focus on ( something that wasn't openly staring at the eye-catchingly large bruise on Beverly Marsh's face. ) He knew, with an odd sense of disconnect, that this was his cousin but that was as far as the knowledge of the girl standing in his living room seemed to extend. His mother had mentioned it to him but with the sort of distance in her voice that made him unsure about whether he was supposed to be doing anything with that information or not. There were vague memories of playing together from a time when memories were faded and uncertain- distant enough that you couldn't help but wonder if they were real or made up to fill the spaces. Memories he doubted because they only ever bubbled up when he caught sight of one of the three or four pictures they had of a small, smiling Beverly.

If he'd had any urge to speak to her it was resoundingly tamped down the moment they'd all entered middle school and the rumors started. He didn't believe them. He might not know anything about Beverly, but he hated rumors and especially the kind that didn't just hurt in a childish middle school kind of way. What he did believe is that after the rumors started something in Beverly changed and she'd become this other wordly entity in the halls of Derry Middle. She walked alone, head held defiantly, and green eyes scanning her surroundings with a sense of detachedness that Will couldn't help but envy.

Now here she was standing in his house and looking decidedly not like that at all. Aside from the ugly purple across her skin, the distance she cultivated around herself had fallen away. She was rubbing nervously at her elbows, and offering him an uncertain smile. One that he couldn't help but mirror himself even as he stood rooted to his spot.

Usually he'd be on his way to his room right now. Depositing his backpack and digging out his art supplies or spreading his homework across his desk. Waiting for the call to dinner and daydreaming about what tomorrow would bring. Wondering about Mike's campaign, fiddling with his character sheet, preparing his dice, and practically itching for the next morning to hurry up and get here.

Now however, he wavers on his feet. Distantly registering the people speaking outside and trying not to openly stare. His hands fiddle with the straps of his backpack, and he and Beverly seem to be caught in this strange stand-off. One that doesn't begin to dissipate until Joyce finally renters the room and closes the front door behind her.

"You two hungry?" She says, giving them both a smile, and shattering the odd tension in the air.

"A little Mrs. Beyers." Beverly says, snatching at the question like it's a life preserver. She didn't think meeting Will face-to-face would feel so awkward. She'd been waiting for him and Jonathan to get home, overeager for a family after so long thinking it was her dad or nothing at all. It hadn't struck her exactly how awkward this whole situation was until he was here and she realized- shit, she hadn't even known she had a cousin until a few hours ago. Seeing Will standing on the porch, outside of barely registered glances at school, felt a lot like something final. This morning really had happened, she really had done what she'd done. She was here, this wasn't a dream.

It was a lot to have crashing over you at once.

"Joyce is fine sweetie." A smile in Bev's direction, shifting so she could give the girl a soft pat on the arm. The briefest of reassurances before she was moving past them and into the kitchen. "I managed to get a hold of Jonathan so he should be home soon. I think it's better if we wait for him before we talk."



The kitchen was small, the dining table at its center simple enough to suit their needs. It was a comfortable place, the center of the house if he thought about it enough. Where he'd sit and draw, where they had dinner together, and where he did his homework. He had a desk in his room but it was better out here- with his family. Even then he felt almost robotic as he made his way over to his favorite chair, letting his backpack slide to the ground beside him once he'd sat down. Not meaning to look as stiff and anxious as he had, and glancing briefly in Beverly's direction to see if she noticed.

For a moment their eyes met- hers widening just the slightest bit, before their gazes dropped away from each other. Hers, to watch her feet as she moved towards the chair across from Will. His, to focus on his hands as they rested on the table, fingers flexing against the familiarly worn surface.

----

Joyce could feel the awkward tension in the room like an incessant crackle of electricity. She sorely hoped that once everything was out and explained it would dissipate. If not tonight than at the very least within the next few days. Jim had told her to take a breather and relax when she'd voiced her fears about this not working out. She wanted so desperately for this to go well, not for her own sake, but for Beverly's. The moment Jim had shown up at her work to explain what happened with Alvin her blood ran cold. Her mind snapping back to the last time she'd seen the little red haired girl as they lowered her mother's coffin into the ground. She'd tried, really she had, to strong arm her way into her brother's life. Alvin had always been a stubborn bastard. Quick to temper but docile enough, especially after he'd met Beverly's mother.

His wife's death had been like an earthquake to Alvin's foundations. His whole world had come crumbling down around him and instead of shifting to focus on his daughter, he'd turned into something else. Something venomous. She'd fucking tried. She'd even gone so far as to try and elbow her way into her brother's apartment, yelling obscenities at him and standing her ground even in the face of his rage. She wasn't an especially tall woman, but if there was one thing Joyce Beyers was capable of it was to give absolutely no shits about how much she had to crane her neck to glare up at a man's face.

Especially not when her family was concerned.

Like it or not Alvin Marsh was her family.

He'd fought her, every step of the way, growing increasingly more hostile with each attempt. Like a wild animal with its back pressed against the wall. She hadn't wanted to give up, but it was Beverly and her concern for her that finally made her step back. She didn't recognize this version of the man she'd grown up with. It terrified her, not knowing what he was capable of. The sneer on his face as he called her a bitch, the absolutely vacant look in his eyes. Empty except for something dark and rabid coiling in their depths.

It wasn't her own safety she feared for. She practically dared her brother to raise his hand against her because then she'd have something other than their shared blood to stand on. Even if it meant he'd get carted off to who knows where and Beverly would end up in her house, at least it was something. It would help.

Then she'd found herself thinking about the rage she inevitably left him in. She got to go home, she got to calm down and regroup, but what about Beverly? What happened in that house once she left?

The thought made her nauseous.

It made her rethink her approach, going slow and trying her best to be there as much as she was allowed- which, admittedly was absolutely not at all. She never got to see Beverly, not until she'd catch glimpses of her at school when she dropped Will off. She never made it past the front door.

Then her own marriage took a nose-dive and for a while Alvin and Beverly Marsh became the least of her worries. She had Lonny to contend with and keeping him as far away from Will and Jonathan as she could manage. It wasn't easy to forget about the little girl she'd loved as fiercely as her own children, and she hadn't done it on purpose, but she'd thought ( foolishly, oh so foolishly ) that maybe things weren't that bad.

Seeing the bruise on Beverly's face felt like getting struck by a bus. Even now, she felt like she couldn't look at the girl for more than a

few moments. At least not without risking every horrible thought she'd ever had about her brother showing up on her face.

Small talk was happening, it was like pulling teeth, but it was happening nonetheless. A question about school directed at Will got her relatively non committal and one word answers in response. Usually she pushed a little more, but they were all nervous, and Will looked almost relieved when she didn't ask him to elaborate about his day. Which, Joyce decided somewhat offhandedly, she was going to unpack later.

Long stretches of silence racked up between all of them with startling efficiency. Settling like a shroud and making their attempts at any sort of conversation feel like the last desperate shouts of a drowning man. A smattering of words before the waves crashed over them again and forced them back into silence. Which, made Joyce glad she at least had cooking to focus on. The tension in her shoulders growing so taunt it was almost painful.

By the time she could hear Jonathan's car coming up the drive she felt like she was physically going to snap in half down the length of her spine.

She'd come so close to just blurting everything out a half dozen times already. The only thing keeping her in check being the fact that she really didn't want to have to explain the situation more than once. Plus, it was better that they were all together as a family.

"Oh good you're home! Sit. Sit." She waved at the kitchen table before her eldest son could so much as get a greeting out. "Dinner's just about done." She did her best to cook for them when she had the chance but nights where she actually got to use her kitchen and make them food were rare. She worked late most nights in a desperate attempt to keep their heads above water- something she tried not to let herself worry about considering she now has a whole other mouth to feed.

Bev was getting to her feet, "Can I help?"

Joyce shook her head, "No, it's alright. I've got it." It didn't take much to scoop spaghetti into four separate plates.

“Hey Beverly.” Jonathan gave the younger girl a soft smile, even as his eyes flicked towards his mom’s back in curiosity. Unlike Will, he remembered the time she used to spend at their house when she was small, and he remembered why she stopped coming by too.

“Hey.” She said, fidgeting in her chair.

Joyce busied herself for a moment longer with setting a plate down in front of each chair. Then grabbing a shaker of parmesan cheese and setting it down at the center. Followed by four glasses of water and a roll of paper towels, before she finally let herself sit down with a sigh and a smile.

The air still held that crackle of electricity and everyone was looking at her expectantly she honestly shouldn’t have been surprised nobody was going to start eating first. Letting out a slow breath of air Joyce let her shoulders slump slightly. “Alright. I guess we can get the elephant out of the room before we dig in.”

Her eyes skimmed over to Beverly, considering her words carefully. As much as Alvin’s behavior concerned her family, she didn’t necessarily think it *concerned* them. There were certain things, things that she knew it wasn’t her right to say out loud. She would leave all that, whatever the details of it might be, to Beverly. If she decided to never tell a soul what happened between her and her father then that was entirely understandable. The point of the matter was that Joyce wasn’t going to rip the information out of her. The poor girl had been through enough as it was.

“So, in case it wasn’t obvious, Beverly is going to be living with us from now on.” She turned her eyes away from her niece and let her gaze drift from one son to the other. “Her father’s going away for a- well, for a long time.” She could see Beverly flinch out of the edges of her vision, but she forced her gaze to remain locked on Will. “I don’t really know what the most comfortable arrangement is right now, but is it okay if she takes your room for tonight Will?”

Her son, bless his soul, doesn’t even hesitate. He just smiles at her and nods. “Yeah, that’s cool mom. I don’t mind.”

The response makes Joyce beam brightly, and a flood of relief she

wasn't aware she'd been waiting for blossom across her chest. "Perfect. We'll figure out how we're going to make this work out later, but you can sleep with Jonathan or with me tonight."

"Hey, it'll be just like a sleepover." Jonathan says, reaching across the table with a closed fist and waiting for Will to bump his against his knuckles. "You can tell me all about your game tomorrow, maybe I'll even show you how to use my camera so you can bring me back some awesome pictures."

That had Will grinning, practically bouncing in his chair. "Really? That'd be so cool!"

For a moment Joyce's attention was pulled away from her sons towards the girl she'd brought into her home. She didn't really recognize the expression on Beverly's face at first, but there was something soft in the little smile- like she didn't realize she was being watched just yet. Her expression was open, fond, and something else Joyce couldn't name.

They both startled when Will turned his attention towards his cousin. "It's going to be really cool having you here Beverly."

She smiled, "You can call me Bev."

"Bev." He nodded, and then beamed. "Welcome home, Bev."

The smile on Beverly's face, Joyce decided, was a lot like watching the sunrise.

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Dinner was so much easier after everything was said and done. Beverly was almost sure that the tension she'd felt since Will got home would suffocate all of them before they finished eating. It felt so thick she was surprised she'd been able to move in it, and every time she tried to speak it was like her words just didn't exist. Her lips would part but nothing would come up her throat. No sound and hardly even a breath of air. She didn't remember the last time she'd felt so suffocatingly nervous.

She didn't think she'd ever felt like this before.

It was a relief when the words came easier and she even found herself laughing. Feeling like she actually might belong in this house which is more than she could ever say about living with her father. When was the last time they'd had a family meal? A happy one? The two of them sitting at a table and laughing about something or telling each other about their day- just thinking about it made her scoff. Zero times. That's how often. Not once. Not in her short memory could she remember anything like this, not after mom was gone anyway.

There was a warmth that spread down into her toes, a sense of fullness that couldn't be blamed solely on the heaping plate of spaghetti she'd devoured like a starving animal. Home. Will had welcomed her home, and the more she thought about it the more awestruck by the concept she seemed to get. Absolutely dazed at the idea as she stepped out of the bathroom, freshly showered and dressed in some of Joyce's clothes ( most of her pajamas, sadly had not made it through her father's rampage. )

It wasn't until she heard Will saying her name that her mind snapped back into the present. "What- sorry, I kind of spaced out."

"Oh, I was just-" He paused, chewing on his bottom lip and rubbing one of his arms nervously. "I just wanted to ask if you had any plans for tomorrow?" He flinched a bit, color rising in his face as he looked at pretty much everything except her.

"Not really." She said, and did her best to offer him a reassuring smile, even though he wasn't exactly looking at her. "Social circles tend to avoid me like the plague."

Usually, on the weekends, she kind of just rode her bike to some out of the way corner of the world and smoked. Or she'd make her rounds through Derry just trying to kill as much time before she had to make her way back home again.

Will still hadn't said anything more, his mouth pressed into a tight line, and his eyes large and almost frantic like he was trying to talk himself into something.

"Why?"

She watched his mouth open, then close, and then open again. A struggle to get the words out and a flash of self-doubt glinting under the sheer overwhelming weight of the embarrassment she could feel rolling off of him.

“I was- um, well, my friends have this thing, and I thought maybe you would want to, I don’t know, come with me?” He was almost vibrating where he stood now, hands shooting up like he expected her to start bucking like a startled horse. “Yo-you don’t have t-to of course! I just, thought- cause you’re- and you-” he was stumbling over his words, and growing quieter the more he spoke.

She took a step towards him, tentatively reaching to place a hand on his shoulder. “What are you guys doing tomorrow?”

He didn’t flinch when she touched him so that felt like a good sign, and her question seemed to force him to actually breathe. “Um, well- we kind of, ah. Play dungeons and dragons?” His face scrunches up as he looks at her, “I- I don’t know if you’d like it, but my friends are nice.” Plus it’s better than being here, alone.

But Will didn’t say that, and she was thankful he didn’t.

After a moment’s consideration, more for show than anything else, considering she’s already made her decision. “I’d like that. Yeah.” She beamed, and the smile she received in return was just as bright.

“Really?”

“Yep!” Her brows furrowed, feigning an expression of seriousness. “Fair warning, I know absolutely shit all about dungeons and dragons.”

Will waved that off, “That’s okay. We can teach you if you want, or you can just listen.” He shrugged, “It’s kind of just a story, I guess.”

“Sounds like fun, I can’t wait.”

It surprised them both when Will hugged her, but the gesture was hardly unwelcome. It was a small, short hug, but it meant the world to her in a way she didn’t really have any words for just yet.

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight Bev.”

---

Jonathan was patient. He didn't say anything when he got home or all through dinner. He didn't corner his little brother in the hallway or as he was coming out of the bathroom. No. He waited, and he was patient, and in a lot of ways it was actually pretty convenient that Beverly was here now. There was a reason Will was going to be alone with him, he didn't have to corner his brother and bombard him with questions.

So he didn't say anything, not until Will was in his room and the door was closed behind them.

At that point, all of Jonathan's patience went flying out the window.

“So Nancy called me.”

As soon as he said it Will stiffened up like a board halfway to the bed. His shoulders flinching up so high that they covered his ears, one foot frozen in mid-step like he was stuck inside a photograph.

“What happened?”

He watched as his little brother slowly sagged in defeat. The rigidity in his body melting to a visible trembling that shuddered down the length of his spine. When he turned, he didn't meet Jonathan's eyes, and instead stared pointedly at the patch of carpet stretched between them. “Nothing happened-”

“Will.” Jonathan's tone shifted, “I know about Bowers and his goons.”

“I swear nothing happened.” Will said, looking up finally. “I'm fine. Really. Everyone was too focused on Mike and Richie.” Except for Patrick. The thought came unbidden and entirely unwanted, making him flinch. Accompanied with the mental image of the much taller boy's face drawn up in a predatory snarl and the phantom ache of his



body getting slammed against a brick wall.

Jonathan was watching his brother far too intently to miss it. "Will. What happened?" This time, he sounded soft, tired. A step towards his brother, hands moving to rest on his shoulders as his body bent down enough to bring them eye level. "You can tell me, you know that right?"

Will looked not unlike a deer caught in the headlights.

Jonathan hated it.

"I-" he was quivering under Jonathan's hands. "Patrick slammed me against a wall." The words came out in a whoosh of air, but Jonathan barely registered them before he had to school his own expression and keep his fingers from reflexively tightening on his brother's shoulders.

Instead he made his eyes close and tried not to think about what it would feel like to run Patrick Hockstetter over with his car.

"Shit." He muttered.

"I'm okay Jonathan, honest. Richie got it so much worse."

"Yeah Nancy told me." He sighed, opening his eyes finally so he could give his brother a once over. He's not sure what he'd have done in Nancy's shoes if he'd come home and found Will with a black eye or a busted lip. Not to say Will hadn't been picked on or bullied before, but he'd never gotten beat up. For one sharp, horrifying moment his mind superimposed the bruise on Beverly's face over Will's features and the sharp knife of rage twisted deeper into his gut.

"Were you going to tell me?" He knew the answer to the question before asking it but he had to hear Will say it outloud.

"No." Will's voice had dropped so low that Jonathan had to instinctively lean in to hear it.

"Look, I won't tell mom about this, but you have to promise to tell me. Okay? No secrets."

Will shifted uncomfortably where he stood, and Jonathan did his best to offer a reassuring squeeze to his shoulders. "Promise me. If Henry or Patrick or anyone hurts you. You tell me. Okay?" He flicked his younger brother's chin, forcing Will to look at him. "I'm your big brother, I'm supposed to keep an eye on you. Don't make me bad at my job, okay buddy? I suck at dish washing enough as it is." That earned a chuckle, which was really all he wanted.

"I promise I'll tell you." Oh, and that. He wanted that too.

"Good." He straightened finally, ruffling Will's hair as he went. "Now where's that character sheet you've been working on?"

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

some things you might be noticing:

there's going to be a lot of stuff from later seasons of ST in here.

S1 fit better with the plot in my head, but the characterizations I wanted for people ( \*cough\* steve \*cough\* ) only come with later seasons.

So yeah, Stranger Things is about to get condensed af so like prepare yourselves I guess

## 7. Ironworks

### Notes for the Chapter:

this chapter is short but i felt like it was important to keep this part by itself.

Derry Ironworks closed in the spring of 1908 after an explosion took the lives of 102 people. As though that fact alone was not enough of a tragedy in a town as small as Derry, the accident happened during an Easter Egg hunt- making 88 of those 102 deaths, children. The factory had been a huge part of Derry's economy at the time, but not even the owners themselves felt able to step foot on that blood soaked ground again. Sure, the building could have been repaired, the workers called back to their jobs. It might not have been easy, but it would have saved Derry the hardships of the years that followed.

Months later they were still finding pieces.

The smell of burnt flesh and singed hair permeated the consciousness of Derry long after it had been blown away on the winds. Anyone who stood in the shadow of the factory would swear that each breath filled their lungs with smoke and death. It was undecided whether hearing the laughter of children was worse than hearing their screams echoing against the walls.

In either case, it was simultaneously decided by all of Derry that the old Ironworks building would rot alone on the outskirts of town.

The deed for the land and the building itself changed hands several times over the intervening decades. None of the owners seemed willing or able to do much with it. There were a few attempts of course- the closest being a man who'd managed to repair the giant gaping hole in the side of the building. A monumental endeavor considering just how rusted and decrepit the rest of it had become over the past few years.

Ultimately? A giant waste of money. No sooner was the construction finished before the company itself went bankrupt and the deed was

forced to switch hands yet again. Passing like a game of hot potato from one unwilling owner to the next, steadily building a reputation of curses and ghosts fit to rival the most haunted of Egyptian tombs.

Owning the deed seemed about as bad as stepping foot on the land itself.

With each passing year the rust spread, the ceilings collapsed, and the weeds continued their merciless reclaiming of the land. Only the most foolhardy of teenaged rebels dared step foot within its walls, and even they hardly lingered for more than a few moments. Laughing high and loud to hide their fear behind a wall of feigned bravado. Shoving each other and cackling with crazed abandon as they ran back to the safety of the town. Pretending that their skin didn't feel like it was made of ants and that their heart wasn't pounding too loud and too fast in their ears.

In the fall of 1951 a cavalcade of cars swept through Derry to congregate on the edges of the Ironworks property. The deed had once more changed hands.

In the early days before there were signs and painted vehicles displaying in bold letters "Derry International Laboratory" There were rumors. The citizens of Derry had never been above idle gossip and when it came to unfounded paranoia, Derry had to rank at least in the top ten as far as US cities went. The fact that the Cold War was in full swing, Americans gripped with a fear of foreign powers and impending nuclear disaster, didn't help matters in the slightest. Rumors spread like wildfire about government conspiracies and aliens and Russian spies. Hushed voices and shifting eyes following each new development as it took place even as they waited for the inevitable. Certain that these people would eventually be chased away by the old ghosts just like everyone who'd come before them.

To all of Derry's surprise, they didn't.

Slowly but surely the unsalvageable parts of the old factory were torn down and carted away. The encroaching nature was pushed back, and new pristine walls seemed to burst from the carcass left behind like a Phoenix. A fence sprang up with no trespassing signs scattered along its length and an influx of strangers seemed to appear on

Derry's doorstep overnight. The kind of people you don't expect to see in a small, inconsequential town, so small that sometimes people just forgot to include it in maps. Like Derry itself was an enigma that existed only for those trapped inside of it.

Scientists and engineers and government officials. Pristine suits and long white lab coats with IQs so high they seemed like myths.

For a time this new development in the ordinary and ever unchanging lives of small town America consumed Derry. It was all anyone talked about. Inevitably, like moths drawn to a flickering candle, the conversation would turn towards the old Ironworks. Theories that grew wilder and less probable with each word spoken, hushed tones slipping away as people grew bolder. It went against some universal truth that they'd accepted in the spring of 1908 when the fires of that tragic day were still smoldering. In truth they'd accepted the haunted mystery of that old building long before any of the myths and legends had found purchase. It had become cursed ground the moment it was soaked with the blood of 88 children and the fact that anything could stick seemed impossible.

Yet, the Derry International Laboratory remained and the secrets within its walls eventually lost their luster once the reality of their permanence set in.

That night, something unimaginable happened. All the myths and all the secrets, the age old ghost stories and the whispered possibility of government spies, came to a rumbling head deep in the bowels of that tiny inconsequential town.

While Beverly Marsh sat hugging her knees on her cousin's bed.

While Jonathan Beyers explained the functions of his camera to his awestruck little brother.

While Joyce Beyers sat on her front porch with a cigarette on her lips, her mind tangled in bitter memories of childhood.

While Richie Tozier poked at the bruise on his face and winced.

While Mike Tozier, Lucas Sinclair, and Dustin Henderson sat gathered

around a bowl of popcorn in the Tozier's basement. Whispering about superpowers and what they'd do to Henry Bowers if they had any.

While Nancy Tozier wound her fingers in the cord of her phone, listening to Steve Harrington closing down the Derry Scoop. His voice sharp and aggravated- hissing the names of Henry Bowers and his friends like venom.

While Bill Denbrough sat frail and sickly in his bed, but bright-eyed and determined. "Like this Georgie." No stutter, as he explained how to control the small, blue remote powered truck.

While Eddie Kaspbrak lay in bed, listening to the sound of his mother's tv. Staring at his open window and grumbling because he knows no one's coming through it tonight, and he feels stupid for hoping anyway.

While Stanley Uris is sitting, fist clenched so tightly he knows there'll be marks and maybe even blood, wishing tomorrow wouldn't come. He tries to sleep but his mind is filled with Hebrew and the twisted face of a woman is painted on his eyelids.

While the citizens of Derry sleep, or prepare to sleep.

Something in the air rips like too thin paper with a pen shoved through.

A red glowing slice, like the remnants of a popped balloon at a carnival, pulses with the heartbeat of the universe. *Danger!* It's screaming the word, but the men who held that sharp pencil don't hear it. They're triumphant...for one brief, glittering second. They think they've won something.

A jingle of bells, a high-pitched and nearly maniacal laugh.

It's the last thing anyone hears before the alarms and the screams. People run, people hide, but it does them no good. That night, like that warm spring day all those years ago, the ground of the old Ironworks is bathed in blood.

By the time the guards come with their guns and their layers of riot gear. The lower labs are painted red.

*Float.Float.* **FLOAT.** F L O A T.

Giant, red letters. Scrawled in blood down a hallway that feels like it won't end.

***FLOAT.***

Somewhere above, the town of Derry is quiet and peaceful.

## 8. mad max

### Notes for the Chapter:

OKAY first things first, I wanted so much stuff to go into this chapter.

I was going to have this be the BIG moment where shit goes down, but then I realized I was going to be leaving town after tomorrow and it just wasn't feasible.

I wanted to get something posted, but I also didn't want to leave you guys hanging for a week or more (visiting family kind of puts me in a bad funk )

So have this kind of filler chapter that's also super important cause MAX.

again, fair warning for Henry Bowers and homophobic slurs.

I've pretty much given up on completing this before November but that's fine, I'm still determined to finish which is more than I can say for any of my other nanos. I also want to thank each and every person that's commented ;o; I'll respond to your comments soon I promise, but just know that I've screencapped all of them and saved them on my phone and I read them when I'm feeling unsure about myself. IT MEANS SO MUCH THAT YOU ALL LIKE IT SO FAR and i hope it lives up to expectations.

This is getting long but I want to thank my friend Sammi for helping me brainstorm a lot of this. Especially this chapter in particular. uwu

Last but not least, I'm taking requests in terms of one-shots and other It related content. SO if you've got anything you want written just hmu. Or if you want me to write little offshoots, spin-offs, or random



memories from this verse, I can do that too.

Richie is an expert at sneaking out of his house when he's not supposed to. He's mastered the art of shimmying down from their second story window, landing with a soft thump on their carefully manicured lawn not unlike a character from his comic books. Most of the time he sneaks out in the middle of the night, usually to see Eddie, and especially when Mrs. K has been particularly awful. Turns out even all that patented Tozier dick wasn't enough to dial down her bitch meter. Richie never really understood why the mere sight of him made her entire face look like she'd just stepped in dog shit, but considering that's how a fair number of adults looked at him he'd grown used to it. The only issue with Mrs. K hating his guts was that it sometimes made hanging with Eddie that much harder. Which is what prompted his nightly escapes to the Kaspbrak residence, and why it was so easy to slip out of his room this morning. Even with his sore hip he could manage the climb down, though his eyes darted fearfully around his side yard once he hit the grass. He rarely did this in broad daylight for various reasons. Not the least of which being, despite popular belief, he knew how to use fucking *doors*.

Was he going to see Eddie? No, unfortunately. At least not right this second. The plan for today was to visit Bill and it still stood, but only once Stan and Eddie managed to weasel their way out of their respective parent's grasps. Whenever the fuck that'd be.

Left with the very real possibility of dying from boredom because Nancy refused to let him outside by himself and Mike and his friends were hogging the basement. Richie did the only logical thing he could think of. Which was in hindsight probably also the stupidest thing he could think of. Go to the arcade. So, yeah, maybe going to play Street Fighter by himself when Henry Bowers had a bounty out for him was a dumb plan, but Richie was bored. Richie didn't do well when he was bored. His skin felt tight, he lost focus in absolutely everything, and he felt like doing a thousand things at once while also simultaneously laying face down on the carpet and dying. He wasn't an idiot, he knew he was tempting fate and that Nancy would kill him if Bowers didn't beat her to it, but he just couldn't stay in that house anymore. Not without feeling like he was going to spontaneously combust.

So far nobody seemed to really notice that he snuck out most nights, except for Mike. It was hard to keep that kind of thing a secret considering they shared a bedroom and he'd woken up more than once to the sounds of Richie climbing in and out of their window. There was a mutual agreement between them that they didn't rat on each other whenever they caught themselves doing shit they weren't supposed to. One that had been struck the first time Richie got caught and had to beg Mike to shut the fuck up about it. Not that Mike got himself in near as much trouble as his twin did, but in the rare moments that he did- he had leverage over Richie to guarantee his silence.

"Not so bad Trashmouth." Richie muttered under his breath as he dusted off his hands and crept towards where he'd left his bike. A few beats of hesitation keeping him grounded with his hands on the handlebars as he stared up at his home. When the proverbial shoe didn't drop and the morning remained silent, he sighed in relief and walked his bike towards the street.

His hip didn't hurt nearly as much as yesterday but the dull ache was still there, which made him glad for once that Derry was small and his home wasn't all that far from where he wanted to be. At least this time he could hold his bike straight without any help. Plus the wind blowing against his bruised face felt nice, like the wound on his features made his skin too warm and heated. The summer sun had been getting pretty insistent these last couple of days, but this early in the morning there was still a remnant of the cool breezes from the night before. The wind rustling his hair and making Richie feel like he was flying as he pedaled his bike faster and faster down the street. It didn't really hold a candle to the handful of times he rode on the back of Bill's bike, but the swoop he felt in the pit of his stomach as he coasted down a slight incline was thrilling in its own way.

Walking into the arcade always did something to Richie. It was like hitting a solid wall of sensory overload; the sights, the smells, and above all the noises. That frenzied cacophony of video game sounds and screaming kids. It was chaos in its purest, most unhindered form, and Richie felt centered there. It was too loud, too boisterous, just like him. Where everywhere else he seemed to struggle to sit still, struggle to shut up, in the arcade he was borderline silent. The eyes

magnified by his glasses glazed over with technicolor imagery as his hands slammed the buttons in a wild frenzy.

He could spend hours here, days even. Hell, he wouldn't mind setting up a mattress next to Street Fighter so he could wake up and go to sleep playing that one game for the rest of his life.

Okay, well, maybe not his entire life. That kind of sounds pathetic.

Like he wants to get married to a video game machine.

His glasses and his mouth stripped him of enough cool points as it was. No need to really drive the point home. Aggressively shaking the thought of the Street Fighter machine in a wedding veil out of his head, Richie made a b-line for the token dispenser. He kept a decent collection of quarters stashed under his bed for moments like this when he couldn't ask his parents or mooch off his friends. The little plastic bag in his pocket had maybe a good few hours of gaming in it if he played his cards right, which he usually did.

This early after opening there wasn't really a lot of people around. It was Saturday and they'd all had school yesterday. If Richie hadn't been suffering the whole night trying to find a comfortable position to sleep in for both his hip and his face, he'd probably still be asleep right now. Dead to the world because he'd snuck out the night before to keep Eddie company or pop up under Stan's window like an obnoxious jack-in-the-box.

Gathering up his tokens, Richie spun on his heel and then froze. The grin on his face dimming slightly, morphing into something closer to confusion.

There was a girl playing Street Fighter.

It's not really that girls never stepped foot in the arcade. They did. He'd even seen one or two playing Street Fighter specifically. It was the fact that it was a *strange* girl. Now, Richie might not be the most popular kid in school or particularly observant when it came to his peers. He couldn't tell you every kid in Derry's name obviously, but he'd been going to school with most of them since they were in preschool. He didn't know everybody, but he knew enough. Like

some internal small town bell was clanging obnoxiously in the back of his mind and screaming: THIS IS NEW. PAY ATTENTION.

Then there was the context clues ( see, he pays attention in school )

She was unfamiliar to him which was the first thing. She didn't exactly meld into the crowd given her bright red hair which was the second thing- he knew only one other person with hair like that and you couldn't miss Beverly Marsh walking down the halls if you tried. Finally, her hands were moving over the buttons of his favorite game the same way his did. Like she knew exactly what the fuck she was doing. Like she'd done this about as many times as he'd done it. If there was a girl *anywhere* in this shithole town who knew how to play Street Fighter as good as he did, *he'd know*.

Well, that settles that then. He had to meet her.

Sucking in a breath, assuring himself that he was going to be annoying regardless, he practically hopped in the direction of his favorite game. A wide grin on his face as he made his best attempt at folding his uncoordinated limbs into something resembling nonchalance.

"So, you trying to beat my highscore?"

The girl, flicked her eyes away from the screen for the barest of moments. A near imperceptible twitch of the eyes, but seemingly enough to decide that she was thoroughly unimpressed.

"You're Trashmouth?"

"The one and only!" He stepped back, offering an over-the-top bow in her direction. One that made his hip twinge uncomfortably, but felt absolutely necessary. "Riche "Trashmouth" Tozier's the name, Street Fighter's the game." Voice rolling easily into his announcer impression, which only heightened the feeling of unimpressed that was coming off the girl in waves.

Still, she huffed. It wasn't exactly a laugh, but he'll take it.

Her round ended with a solid victory on her part, which allowed her

to finally turn to look at him. One eyebrow arching up towards her hairline as she gave him a more thorough once over. "What the hell happened to your face?"

Richie grinned, "You should see the other guy." Which, was a nice sentiment but ultimately untrue. He doubted his own punch had left any sort of lasting impression, and he really had no desire to see Henry Bower's dick to find out if he'd done visible damage.

The girl's face was neutral and borderline bored.

She kind of reminded him of Stan. *Huh*. They'd probably get along, if only so they could both look at him like his very existence personally disappointed them. "Honestly? Used my face to save a few damsels in distress. You know- real superhero shit."

"Uh-huh. *Right*."

Richie couldn't shake the feeling that if she had gum she'd be popping it in his face right now.

The girl's eyes seemed to size him up, raking over him like she was trying to figure out if he was lying or not. Either about being the actual top score on that machine or about the whole 'hero' thing, he couldn't be sure. Probably both. "You gonna play or what?" She said finally.

The smile on his face was bordering on manic, so wide it hurt the bruises on his skin. "Don't have to ask me twice." And if he tripped over his own feet a little getting to the second set of buttons beside her, it was worth it to hear her laugh.

They made it two rounds before he realized something. Tongue sticking out between his teeth in concentration he didn't rip his eyes from the screen for even a second. "Hey, what's your name anyway?"

"Max." Delivered with about as much emotion in it as his own question had been. That blank, far off sort of voice that signaled they were entirely engrossed in the task at hand.

"Cool."

“Yep.”

“Hope you’re ready to lose, Max. ”

“In your fucking dreams.”

It was good, it was great. It made him forget everything that happened yesterday and to pat himself on the back for his impromptu decision to sneak out that morning. The idea that he could have been stuck wallowing in his room instead of playing the best rounds of Street Fighter he’d ever experienced was almost too horrible to consider.

He was so caught up in the game and the girl elbowing him hard in the side, that all sense of self-preservation was flying decidedly out the window.

“Well if it isn’t faggot four-eyes Tozier.”

Henry Bower’s voice had this uncanny ability to turn the world into a pit of slime. No matter how safe a place felt, no matter how clean and ultimately care-free a situation was. One word from the bane of Derry Middle’s hallways, and it was like the air itself was leaking sludge. Hearing Bower’s speak made Richie feel like he hadn’t taken a bath in his entire life, like his skin was made of every disgusting thing known to man. Considering he’d once mud wrestled in the mouth of a fucking sewer pipe with Bill, it said a lot that he felt dirtier standing right here than he ever did back then.

Instinctively Richie’s entire spine locked into place, his shoulders shooting up past his ears in a visible flinch. He didn’t turn around but his eyes glazed over and his focus on the screen in front of him shattered like a pane of fragile glass. He couldn’t see anything past his nose, not even Max’s final hit or the large K.O. that flashed across the screen at his loss.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

Shit. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Crap.

He hadn’t forgotten about yesterday, not really. He’d pushed the thought aside and let other more pleasant things take its place. He’d

let the soothing effects the arcade had on his otherwise hyperactive personality blind him to the fact that it wasn't safe. The arcade was a public place, open to everyone. It wasn't Richie's own personal safe haven. It didn't care if Henry Bowers and his goons beat the shit out of him in the main lobby. *It wasn't safe.*

And that thought broke something inside of him.

Maybe later he'd realize it was his heart, but right now it felt too deep and vital to self analyze. The hand he had on one of the joysticks fell slack, slipping away from the game in front of him.

Suddenly the comforting sounds of the arcade felt like a fist closing around his throat.

"You must be real fucking stupid to show your face here after yesterday."

Max seemed to realize that the older boys behind them were addressing him specifically, because she turned to look at him curiously. She seemed about to say something but didn't get much chance before he could feel a hand yanking him backwards by the collar of his shirt. The mantra of expletives running through his head got so loud and so fast they lost any sense of comprehension.

A strangled yelp is all he managed to get out as he stumbled backwards.

Richie couldn't help but mourn all the bravado he'd had yesterday. That sense of invincibility that came with being young and foolish and ready to throw yourself in a fire for someone important. On his own, with his foundations shaken, he felt like an ant staring up at their impending doom as the four larger boys surrounded him. Any smart words he might have said, any insults he might have spat out dried up before they even made it up his throat.

"What? Nothing to say today Tozier?" Henry sneered, and suddenly there was something sharp and icy cold pressed to his face. He didn't dare look at it, too focused on the rough dig of fingers on his chin and cheeks, holding him in place. He knew if he saw what it was he'd

start crying, or worse, just die of a stroke then and there. “Cat got your tongue?” And the pressure on his face was harder now, painful. Two fingers digging specifically into the hinge of his jaw, forcing his mouth open against his will. “Hmm, nope. Still there.”

*Knife. Knife. Knife. Knife.*

He couldn't avoid looking at it now. Not when it was dragging across his lips.

“Maybe I should cut it out, save the cat some trouble?”

Somewhere behind him he could hear Patrick's laughter and it made Richie's entire body start quaking.

“Fuck off.” God he was terrified. He'd never been so scared in his entire life. Where were the adults? Wasn't there usually someone behind the counter? A parent with their kids? Where the fuck was everybody? Why was it so loud? The panic was setting in, tight around his heart and constricting his lungs. How he managed to find any words at all was a miracle.

“Oh ho, he's got something to say after all.” Henry shook his face from side to side, and that sneer made Richie feel like he'd been dipped in vomit or bathing in shit. He felt like he needed to go home and get soaked in acid just to get his skin clean again. “C'mon four-eyes. Let it out. Give us your last words.”

He swallowed. Hard.

His jaw hurt, and his body ached in sympathy or perhaps as a premonition of what was to come.

*Be stupid. If you're going to die. Be a fucking idiot.*

He's not sure why the voice in his head sounded exactly like Eddie, because he was almost positive Eddie would never tell him to do what he was about to do, but fake Eddie or not. It was still Eddie's voice, and Richie would roll over backwards off a cliff if Eddie asked him to.

“L-last words?” It was hard to talk with Bower's hand holding his jaw



like that. He should have left it at that because he was sure it would take absolutely nothing at all for the larger boy to break his jaw or stab him in the face, but he was being stupid. It's what he did best. "Do your balls still hurt or did Patrick kiss them better?"

Oh, the fury. The absolute unadulterated rage that punched out of Bower's face the moment Richie's words left his mouth. Suddenly the pain on Richie's jaw wasn't a mild discomfort. It was agony. The fingers digging into his skin had lost all control and it almost felt like Henry really was trying to shatter his jaw with his bare hands.

"What the fuck did you say to me, *faggot*?"

Richie couldn't have answered with words if he tried, so he settled for his best attempt at a facial expression that said everything he couldn't. Even if the 'you heard me, dipshit.' had to fight through his pain to reach the surface.

He was sure the knife was going to come into play any minute now, but before it did several things seemed to happen at once.

The first was that something hit Henry Bowers in the head. *Hard*.

The second was that Richie could feel the hand on his face go slack, a stunned look of surprise replacing all of Henry's rage from a second ago. The knife dropped with a clatter.

The third was that Henry went down. Crumpling like a piece of paper to the floor.

The fourth, and final thing, was that without Henry Bowers taking up his entire field of vision. He could see Max standing over him with a skateboard clenched in her hands and held half over her head.

She was the only one in the entire room that didn't seem even remotely surprised by what she'd just done.

Instead she tucked her skateboard under one arm and grabbed his hand with the other. "Let's go!" He responded pretty quickly considering just how shocked he was in that moment. His brain left discarded somewhere behind him as they scrambled hand-in-hand towards the double doors of the arcade and out onto the open street.

The fresh air seemed to drive the point home. The fact that he needed to get the fuck out of here and quickly. That he'd really somehow managed to make things worse for himself and still got to walk away from the situation. Statistically speaking he knew that his luck was going to run out eventually, but right now he needed to put as much distance between him and the arcade as possible. Scrambling to his bike, he climbed on and started pedaling. Max dropped her skateboard to the ground and hopped on, managing to keep pace with him at first. Then when that wasn't working out anymore she grabbed at the fluttering fabric of his hawaiian shirt and allowed him to pull her forward.

He's not sure when he felt safe enough to slow down. He didn't think safe was even a viable concept in Derry, but it was somewhere close to his house.

"Dude, has anyone ever told you you're a badass?" He said, glancing over his shoulder at the girl coasting along beside him. "Because fuck, you just knocked the biggest asshole in Derry out with a skateboard."

She shrugged, but smirked, and it was the first genuine smile he'd seen on her face. "Eh, it was nothing. I've got some experience with dickbags in mullets." Her eyes rolled, "Not sure if I'd call you badass or stupid though."

"It's a fine line baby and I Tozier it."

"Please don't make me regret saving you."

"Oh, I think it's too late for that. We're friends now. I have it on good authority that if you don't regret it already, you're going to."

"Great."

"Hey, you want to come to my place? I've got leftover KFC and a Nintendo."

"Sure, but only because you owe me for saving your life, and for ruining my arcade time."

He grinned, directing them towards his house. "Sounds like a fair

trade to me.”

**Notes for the Chapter:**

I don't know if I can get anything written and posted tomorrow, but if not this will just have to tide you over until I get back home on Monday u-u

## 9. Peace

### Notes for the Chapter:

so i should probably be doing a research paper right now. woops.

anyway this chapter is long, but i needed to get everyone in their places for STUFF and also like...practice dialogue because there's going to be a lot of people in scenes later and it's freaking me out :')

i'm so happy people like it so far ;O; you guys give me life t b h

sorry in advance for typos and stuff it's 3am here rn and i just want this UP

Richie knows that the chance of keeping a low profile and pretending he didn't leave the house was out of the question. Maybe if he was coming back by himself he could play it off somehow, but he's bringing someone with him and he couldn't just claim that Max has materialized in his bedroom. He tried not to let his apprehension show as he led the way up to his front door. Hoping that some fraction of social etiquette would keep Nancy from chewing him a new one the second he walked into the house.

Turning his head a bit to hide the nervous worrying of his bottom lip between his teeth. Richie threw the door open hard enough to hear it bang against the wall. The loud sound made him flinch but he did his best to roll with it, his arms shooting out at his sides like an entertainer walking onto a stage. "Welcome to the Tozier party house. Mi casa es su casa." He swiveled on his heels, doing a complete 180 so that he could let her bask in the full force of his wide grin.

What he was met with was an expression that would give Stan's unimpressed look a run for its money. Richie's smile faltered only slightly in the face of it, if only because he couldn't help but wonder

if Stan would feel threatened by their new friend encroaching on his Thing.

Their new friend. It never once occurred that Max might not want anything to do with Stan and Eddie ( Bill of course being Bill meant that he was excluded just on principle. Richie didn't think anyone who actually met Bill could dislike him. ) It was automatically accepted in the clogged chaos of his subconscious that everything that belonged to him was theirs and vice versa. This simple fact stretching beyond their combined comic book collection and extending to their homes and any friends they happened to make outside of their core group. Not that any of them had friends outside of their group, unless you counted Georgie and maybe Mike if he felt like putting up with Richie's shit that day.

Wow, and he thought marrying the Street Fighter machine sounded pathetic.

Seeing as his theatrics were going over about as well as he expected, he threw up a voice- the British Guy, which sounded extra crappy now that he was milking the shit out of it. "Just follow me, ol' chap. I'll give you the grand tour." He waived, walking backwards into the room.

"Are you always like this or is that bruise on your face a sign of brain damage?" Max cocked an eyebrow at him, her skateboard loosely pressed against her side.

"Oh, he's always like that." A scoff, "Also a giant pain in the ass who is in so much trouble he's not leaving his room until college."

Nancy's voice made Richie freeze, a comically over the top caricature of the moment he'd heard Henry Bowers behind him at the arcade. Doing another spin, he offered his sister a salute and a toothy grin. "Aw c'mon sis don't give up my shtick." Nancy looked pissed but in that subtle, only someone who knows her kinda way. Her arms crossed, her lips straining on her smile. She was standing between the foyer and the dining room in a way that made Richie feel like she'd been waiting for him. He might have withered a bit under that look but he kept plowing through regardless. Powered on by the snort of laughter coming from the girl behind hm. "Also bullshit I'm a fucking

delight AND we both know nobody in this house can put up with me for twenty-four straight hours.” He crossed his arms, sticking his tongue out. “I’d like to see you try to keep me here all the way to college.”

“How can you be a ‘fucking delight’ if people can’t put up with you?” Max said with a snort.

“I like her.” And at least that managed to get that borderline pissed look off of Nancy’s face.

“Wow. Attacked in my own home. Is absolutely nothing sacred?”

“Nope. You lost all sanctuary privileges when you snuck out.”

“Fair, however, I had a bodyguard the entire time!” He gestured at Max, playing it up as though she was every bit the overly buff man the term ‘bodyguard’ brought to mind and not a teenage girl. “Mad Max here is absolutely feral. Gives Eds a run for his money.”

Nancy was unimpressed, which Richie could understand, since she hadn’t been there to witness such raw badassery with her own two eyes. Nevertheless he watched her focus on the girl standing beside him, lips pursed in consideration. “Well if that’s the case, thanks for keeping this idiot alive.”

“It was nothing.” Max said with a half shrug, “You guys really shouldn’t let him off the leash. That’s how they end up getting hit by cars or something.”

“Fuck you.” He gestured at himself, before popping the collar to his overshirt. “You can’t keep all this raw animal magnetism caged.”

Nancy snorted, lips parting to say something in response but stopping as their mother’s voice interrupted.

“Richie, language.” A long suffering sigh accompanying her words. The tone of a woman who knew any and all attempts at controlling her son’s foul mouth were futile but tried anyway. A disapproving look etched onto her features as she stepped out of the kitchen, hands on her hips. “Especially around guests.”

Richie let his lips press shut, mimed locking them with a key before tossing that key over his shoulder. Which only served to earn him an exasperated sigh from his mother before her eyes finally landed on Max.

“Hello.” Her smile brightened, “Who might you be?”

“Hi.” Max adjusted her skateboard to extend her hand out, which Karen took graciously. “Max Mayfield, I just moved here.”

“Well, welcome to Derry dear. Hope my son’s not giving you too much trouble, he can be a bit of a handful.”

“He’s alright.”

Karen chuckled, her eyes crinkling slightly in the wake of her smile. “That he is.” She moved then to step closer to her son, ruffling his hair softly and ignoring Richie’s protests. Her attention still squarely on Max. “You came on the perfect day I’d say. We’ve got plenty of leftovers from yesterday and you won’t be the only girl-”

“Wait. What?” Richie’s eyes moved around the room as though expecting said girl to materialize out of thin air. “There’s another girl here?”

Nancy nodded, “Yeah, Will brought his cousin Beverly over.”

“Beverly?” Richie’s brows knitted together in confusion. The only Beverly he knew was Beverly Marsh...but if Will Beyers was cousins with her wouldn’t he know that? Mike and Will had been friends since they first started school and Richie knew almost as much about his brother’s best friend as he knew about his own friends. “Like...Beverly Marsh?” He asked, looking from his mom to his sister, and ignoring the curious stare he could feel coming from Max.

Karen nodded, “Mhmm, she’s just moved in with Joyce poor thing.” Something seemed to pass over the older woman’s expression, her eyes catching on the bruise on her son’s face and darkening. She reached out suddenly, placing gentle fingers against Richie’s cheek. “Does it still hurt?”

Richie startled slightly at the brush of her fingertips on still tender

skin. It didn't hurt, at least not until he pressed his fingers to it anyway. It was still tender and sometimes even the wind made him feel a little uncomfortable, but not enough for him to say anything about it. He shook his head, offering his mom a soft smile. "I'm fine."

Karen didn't look half as convinced and behind her Nancy's expression was nearly identical, but his mom only brushed her thumb lightly across his cheekbone before letting her hand drop back to her side. "If you say so." She said and the edges of her smile was just the tiniest bit strained as she let her gaze move from Richie to Max and back again. "Why don't you two go down to the basement? Max do you want me to heat you up some chicken?"

Max perked up, nodding. "That'd be great Mrs. Tozier, thank you."

Karen smiled, "Any preferences?"

"Um...wings?"

"You got it, and I'll heat a plate up for you too Richie. I'll bring them downstairs in a minute." She leaned forward to press a quick kiss to the top of Richie's head before he could catch on and sprint out of her reach.

"Moouooooom. Not in front of my friends." He swatted at her, albeit half-heartedly. The annoyance not really reaching his eyes, or stopping the sputtered laugh that accompanied his words.

Karen just chuckled, gesturing towards the stairs, a silent gesture for him to get moving. Richie tipped an invisible cowboy hat in her direction before scurrying towards the basement steps and waving for Max to follow. At least Nancy seemed like she was staying up here to help mom so he was saved from any kind of lecture at least for the moment.

"Sup nerds!" He took the last few steps in a leap, landing in the basement with his hands on his hips and a grin on his face. "I bring some much needed cool points to this borefest."

Mike, who'd been mid-description of some troll dungeon or whatever the fuck happened in D&D, shot Richie a look fit to kill. "Fuck off



Richie.”

“Woah. There’s two of you?” Max had stopped on the bottom step, her eyes flicking from Richie to Mike and back again.

“What the fuck are you talking about? We look nothing alike.”

“Yeah, Richie’s uglier.”

That response deserves at least two middle fingers.

Which is, fittingly, when he notices Beverly Marsh sitting cross-legged on one of their couches. He’s not sure what’s more shocking; the fact that she’s actually in his house ( as if he’d been expecting his mom to have lied or hallucinated her existence, or maybe Will just had a Beverly shaped doll who the fuck knows. ) or the large bruise that decorated her face. “Woah.” He says suddenly, then because he’s always suffered from a severe case of no filter, he points at the bruise on his own face. “We match!”

Surprisingly that earns a glare from Will which is an expression that he’s not entirely sure he’s ever witnessed on the other boy’s face before. Then Beverly breaks out in a fit of giggles and a wide grin and the sour look on Will’s face melts into a nervous, almost apologetic, little smile.

“Bruises. This year’s biggest fashion statement.” Beverly says, and something about the way she smiles makes Richie decide quite suddenly that she’s cool.

“I always knew I was hot enough for the catwalk.” He beamed, framing his cheeks with his hands, “I say, if Ms. Marsh says it’s so then it must be!” The Southern Belle Voice makes Mike cringe in his peripheral vision, but it causes a fresh fit of giggles to burst from Beverly, while Max tries in vain to stifle a snort of amusement. That’s a win enough for Richie.

At the very least it reminds him of his manners and he does a turn to get himself closer to Max’s side. “Aaaaanyway.” He drags the word out, gesturing at nothing and noone in particular. “Everyone this is Max, Max this is my nerd brother and his nerd friends; Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas.” He points to each person as he lists them off, then

gestures at Beverly. "And you heard my mom so you already know that's Beverly I guess."

His arm flings itself across Max's shoulders, shaking her abruptly. "You guys won't believe what Max here did to Henry Bowers. It was fucking amazing."

Before Richie could throw himself into his, albeit over the top rendition, of what happened at the arcade Mike was pointing an accusing finger in his direction. "I knew it! I knew you'd sneak out as soon as Nancy told you not to!"

Richie glares, letting his arm drop from its position across Max's shoulder. Vaguely wondering if he should question the fact that they both seem to have settled into some kind of routine. Like they've been friends for more than fifteen minutes. Instead of that though he focuses on shooting Mike another double bird, "Fuck off. Like I was going to spend my morning listening to your bullshit game."

"I'm telling Eddie when he gets here." Mike says instead of taking the bait and biting back. Sometimes he hates that about people. They fold too quickly. Sometimes it feels like Eddie's the only one that tries to put up with Richie's bullshit which says something because Mike was shoved up in a womb with him for like eight and a half months.

He grinds his teeth, "You wouldn't dare."

Mike's expression says that he very much would, and the entire room buzzes with a sudden explosion of awkward. If only because there's two girls there who've been thrust in the middle of this seemingly ongoing saga. At least Mike's friends have the privilege of having witnessed this before.

It's not like Eddie, or Bill for that matter, are his keepers. Fuck that. He has enough dealing with his parents and Nancy hovering over him in concern. He does what he wants and they all know it, and even his mom has given up a little on trying to reign him back in. Bill is the only one that can give him an order and see him follow through with any sort of effectiveness. Eddie is the only one that can make him stop and think before he does something stupid. He might still do the stupid thing ( with Eddie screaming in his ear but along for the ride

anyway ), but at least he takes a minute to consider the implications before he does it. Even Stan can usually keep him in check, beeping him without even glancing at him when he lets his mouth run miles ahead of his common sense.

Shit. Maybe his friends are his keepers.

Thankfully his mom chooses that moment to come down from upstairs carrying two steaming plates of food, Nancy trailing behind her looking put-out with a glass of ice in each hand. "Alright you two, sit." she gestures towards the second couch with her chin, the one Beverly isn't sitting cross-legged on. "There should be some soda bottles lying around down here, so just pour yourselves whatever you want." She moved to set the plates down on the coffee table, then turned her attention to the others. "Everyone doing alright? Nobody needs anything?"

A simultaneous shout of "No, thank you" and "We're good Mrs. Tozier" filled the basement, making Karen beam at them before rounding her way up the stairs.

"We're talking later." Nancy hisses as she steps past him, one hand moving to squeeze his shoulder a little bit too tight. His arms crossed in front of his chest with a huff, eyes rolling behind his glasses but not affording her a glance as they disappear back up the stairs.

You'd think Max had been there before with how easily she sets her skateboard down and flops onto the couch. Making herself at home by pulling one of the plates onto her knees. Richie digs up his manners momentarily to get them both drinks, asking her what she wants before setting their glasses down on the table and sitting down himself.

He's got a piece of chicken shoved into his mouth and his halfway to chewing it before he bothers to speak again. "Can I tell the story now or are you going to still be a little bitch about it?"

"We were playing." Mike says, gesturing at the table and his friends seated around it.

"My story is way cooler than troll orgies Mike."

"It is." Max said, waving a spoon with mashed potatoes on it.

"Can we just hear it so he shuts up?" Lucas groaned, slouching forward in his seat. "I've been waiting all week for this."

"Technically, we only just started." Will said, with a half shrug, earning him a thoroughly betrayed look from Mike.

"Ugh, fine. Tell your stupid story Richie." Mike fell back in his chair, arms crossed in front of his chest.

Richie, mouth full of chicken, beamed triumphantly, then launched into a retelling of the arcade. He chose, somewhat last minute, to keep the whole knife thing to himself. Max shot him a look as he stumbled over that part of the story before regaining his momentum, but otherwise didn't say anything. He was already in trouble for leaving the house he really would be trapped in here until college if anyone found out he'd almost gotten his face carved like a pumpkin.

"--AND THEN SHE KNOCKED HIM OUT WITH HER SKATEBOARD." This part had to be delivered on his feet, nearly flipping his plate as he dumped it onto the coffee table. Surging upwards to mime the action with both his hands. "He looked like a fucking puppet, just-" Richie let himself go limp, collapsing onto the couch like dead weight, doing his best to mimic Bower's shocked expression as he'd gone done.

"Holy shit. Wait. Really? Did you really knock out Henry fucking Bowers?" Beverly was leaning forward where she sat, eyes wide.

Lucas and Dustin were both looking at Max like they'd just noticed her for the first time.

"Uh, yeah. I guess." Max said with a shrug, "I kind of didn't know he was a big deal, we haven't been living here long." She popped a piece of chicken into her mouth, chewing it slowly but completely before speaking again. "I just thought, 'wow what a fucking dick' and went for it, you know?"

Beverly nodded enthusiastically, "Oh yeah, I know. I think everyone in school feels that way about him at least once, even the teachers.

You're just like...the first person to act on it."

"Hey, I kicked him in the balls yesterday. That counts."

"The first person to act on it and not get immediately beat to death." Dustin piped in.

"Last I checked I wasn't dead."

"Shit." Beverly muttered, "No wonder he wants to kill you." She said it with a half smirk on her face and a glint in her eye that made Richie instantly decide he liked her.

"So wait." His eyes widened in momentary realization, gaze flicking from Beverly to Will and back again. "Are you guys really cousins?"

"Yep." Beverly said, popping the 'p'. "It was news to me too until yesterday."

Will nodded, "I kind of knew, but I don't know, it was..."

"Complicated." Beverly supplied, and Will nodded in agreement.

"Well shit." Richie said, his eyes still bouncing from one to the other. "So, what you're living together now, or something? Is this like...temporary?"

"Richie." Mike warned, narrowing his eyes.

Will surprised all of them by interjecting, "It's permanent." He'd turned in his chair enough to angle towards the couch, and there was a look on his face that Richie didn't recognize. Something a little fiercer maybe with a slight edge he didn't think Will could possess.

"Well, that's cool then." Richie said suddenly, brushing off the momentary sense of awkward and focusing back on Beverly. "Tell me if you get tired of hanging with these dweebs and you can chill with us." He turned to Max, "You too!"

Beverly grinned, "I'd like that."

"As long as I don't have to go saving your ass every five minutes,

sure.”

“Absolutely no promises.”

When they finished eating, Richie didn't really want to stick around just to listen to Mike and his friends play D&D. He asked Beverly if she wanted to come up with them to play Nintendo and she agreed with a little wave at Will as they made their way up the stairs. Richie darting off towards the kitchen to leave the plates and cups in the sink before dashing his way up stairs and gesturing for the two girls to follow. Technically he'd never really talked to girls before, not unless you counted his sisters, which he most definitely didn't. All his jokes and stories about sexual conquests aside he was kind of nervous, fiddling with his glasses the whole way to his and Mike's room. Not that he was expecting anything to happen. DEFINITELY NOT. He just...worried. Afraid he'd suddenly freeze up because it was girls. Even though he'd been kind of doing just fine with Max up until this point. Maybe he was nervous because of Beverly...or maybe it was the idea of there being more than one. Which was arguably like...two whole girls more than he was used to not being related to at any given time.

So it was kind of a surprise how easy it was with both Max and Beverly. It was almost like they were one of the guys if he was being honest. They laughed at his jokes, told him when he was being a little shit, and Max even shoved him off the bed when he folded over laughing the moment she died. He's not sure why he'd been nervous now that he was actually sitting here, but it seemed silly in hindsight. He already knew Max was cool and he'd suspected as much about Beverly considering the 'don't fuck with me' vibe she gave off at school, but it was kind of refreshing to get like...confirmation of that fact.

The rumors about her were swirling around in the back of his mind, but he'd been ignoring the rumors about him for a few weeks now so why not extend the courtesy?

He was so busy laughing at something Beverly said that he didn't hear the sound of someone coming up to his room.

“RICHIE! MIKE SAID YOU-” Eddie surged into the room like a tidal wave, banging the door open while Stan flinched behind him. Freezing the second he noticed Max sitting cross-legged on Richie’s bed while Beverly and Richie sat in front of the TV with two controllers. “Uh...hi.” Whatever righteous fury had been about to burst out of him evaporated into a bright red blush that rushed all the way up to Eddie’s hairline.

“I think that means you got tattled on.” Max said with a snort.

“Eddie! Stan! Fucking finally, I’ve been waiting forever.” Richie chose to ignore the comment, scrambling to his feet and over towards his friends. “You guys know Bev, right? That’s Max.”

“Um..hey.” Eddie muttered, giving a small half-hearted wave. “I’m uh, Eddie.”

“Stan.” Stan’s curls bounced with the short bob of his head.

The two girls said a quick hello simultaneously, Bev offering up a smile while Max nodded.

It was a brief, stilted moment of awkward before Eddie pursed his lips and turned his attention to Richie. “Are we still going to Bill’s?”

“Of course we are Eds, I was just waiting for you to slip out of prison.”

“Don’t call me that.” He snapped, but seemed to relax anyway. Some tension leaching out of his shoulders the second he knew their plans for the day hadn’t been cancelled. “Good. Cause I told my mom and I don’t want to lie to her.”

“Aren’t you technically lying already? I mean you also didn’t tell her Bill was sick.” Stan pointed out, earning him a hard glare from Eddie.

“Fuck off. Fine, whatever. One lie is better than two, Stan.”

“If you say so.”

“As your future step-father Eds I don’t know if I can condone lying to

your mother.”

“God you’re fucking disgusting.”

“Bill’s sick?” Beverly’s voice made all three boys whip suddenly around to face her. Blinking owlishly like they only just now realized that there were girls in the room.

“Oh yeah you and Bill made ou- fucking OW, Stanley!”

Stan elbowed him hard in the ribs, hissing a sharp “Beep Beep, Richie.” He focused on Bev, nodding, “Yeah, he’s been out all week. We wanted to go check up on him, give him his homework and stuff.”

“Oh, well, tell him I said hi and that I hope he feels better.” There was just the slightest tinge of pink to her cheeks but the effect was mostly hidden by her bruise, and her expression stayed the same as it had been most of the time Richie had spent with her. An easy, confident smile.

“You could come with us? Both of you can, if you want...” The suggestion tumbled out with the sudden realization that he’d have to ditch his new friends.

“I should probably go back to the arcade.” Max’s face contorted slightly, somewhere between a grimace and full-blown frown. “My brother’ll kill me if he comes to pick me up and I’m not there.”

Bev shrugged, “I’d come but Will invited me over and it feels weird to just ditch...sorry.”

“Oh. Well-” He furrowed his brows at Max momentarily, “You sure you want to go back there? I mean what if Bowers is still there or something?”

Max shrugged, “I can handle myself.”

He didn’t doubt that, but Bowers was Bowers and she’d only managed to catch him off guard. He was just about to say as much when she shook her head and interrupted.



“My brother shouldn’t take long getting there, I’ll be fine.”

He really didn’t think it would be fine and he wanted to say as much. His eyes moving around the room for some support, settling on Beverly who at least knew the story enough to know what Max going back to the arcade was probably a dumb as fuck idea. All he got from her was a shrug of the shoulders which didn’t help and the frown he shot her way said as much. “Alright, fine.” Richie rolled his eyes, but grumbling under his breath as he went to turn the TV and Nintendo off.

The five of them trudging down the steps together, Max and the boys heading for the front door and Beverly making her way back towards the basement. She waved at them as she disappeared down the steps, flashing them all a wide smile. “Remember, tell Bill I said hi.”

“We will.” Eddie said with a nod and a smile of his own.

“Mom! I’m gonna go with Eddie and Stan to see Bill!” Richie called into the house, cocking his head to listen for his mother’s reply.

Karen’s voice echoed from upstairs, “Alright hon, you boys be safe!”

At the top of the stairs Nancy’s head peeked out from around a corner, her eyes narrowing down at them. “Don’t get into trouble again, got it?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Richie said with a half wave, already slipping out the door.

Max stuck with them until they reached the end of the street, splitting off to go towards the center of town. ( “Try not to get murdered Mad Max.” “Back atcha, Trashmouth.” ) The watched her coast forward on her skateboard for a few moments before angling their bikes in the direction of Bill’s neighborhood.

Richie was honestly surprised Eddie managed to hold himself in for so long.

“Did you really go to the arcade Richie? What the fuck is wrong with you?!” The silence shattered around them, Eddie’s temper snapping

like a rubberband. The sheer volume erupting out of his small body making Richie flinch against the handlebars of his bike. "Bowers is literally out for blood right now! I'm surprised he doesn't have a freaking phoneline set-up to take calls about where you are, like I can't believe you're that stupid. How do you get straight A's?"

"I was bored, cut me some slack, alright?" Richie groaned, his head tilting back towards the sky, legs pumping a little harder on his bike to put some distance between them. "Plus, nothing happened. I'm perfectly fine." He gestured at himself, "See?"

"You are not fine." Stan, leveled him with a look that always made him feel vaguely uncomfortable. Like he was getting his skin peeled off or something so that Stan could peek at his insides. Not like Bowers...not maliciously, just- in a friend way.

It still felt fucking awful though.

"Quit looking at me like that."

Stan shrugged, "I'm just saying."

"Yeah, well. Don't. Nothing bad happened, I'm fine. I got to meet Max, the universe is still in fucking balance or whatever." He wanted this discussion to end before he said something stupid, like how there'd been a knife involved, but he had a feeling they were just biding their time. Waiting till they got to Bill's house before pushing him to talk about it which only made him want to turn right back around and head straight home. Even if it meant dying of boredom.

They rode in silence the rest of the way there. Dumping their bikes ( Stan took a second to kick down his stand ) on the Denborough's front lawn and pounding their way up the front steps. Eddie practically tackled Richie out of the way, before he could lay it on thick with the doorbell, half wrestling with him so that Stan could knock politely like an adult.

Surprisingly it wasn't either of Bill's parents that opened the door, but Georgie. A soft smile that broke into an explosively wide grin the second he saw them.

“Georgie!” Richie exclaimed, releasing Eddie from a choke hold and bounding towards Bill’s baby brother, hands instantly moving to ruffle the younger boy’s hair. “Aye do believe ye’ve gotten taller!”

The voice was absolutely terrible. One of his worst and he knew that because Stan and Eddie both made faces at him for it, but Georgie broke out in a fit of giggles and squealed his name, so did anything else really matter?

“Georgie is Bill here?” Stan gestured to the bag he’d been carrying over his shoulder, “We bought him stuff from school.”

Georgie nodded, his face dropping uncharacteristically solemn at the mention of his brother. Usually the second you mentioned Bill Georgie’s entire face lit up like the sun. “Yeah, he’s upstairs. He’s still kind of sick.” He stepped out of the way for them, holding the door so they could walk in and then closing and locking it behind them. “Mom went out to get more medicine and dad had work.”

Eddie looked about thirty times more anxious than usual the moment he stepped into the house. Falling further and further behind them as Georgie led them up the stairs to Bill’s bedroom.

“Georgie who was at the d-door?” Bill was on his bed, sketchbook on his lap, and a pile of tissues scattered around him. He still sounded sick, but not as bad as he’d sounded when they’d spoken to him over the phone a week before. It was clear he was on the mend. Eyes bright and focused, less nasally.

“Wh-what the fu-fuck happened to y-yo-your face, Richie?”

Richie had bounced past Georgie and into the room, electing to ignore the question entirely, “Hiya Bill! We’ve come to rescue you.”

Bill snorted, “From wh-what? T-t-the,” his face scrunched up, “The flu?”

“No you idiot, from boredom.”

“I brought you your homework.”

“Okay, I came to rescue you from boredom. Stan came to murder you

in your sleep.”

“Fuck off Richie.”

“H-here I was th-thinking I al-all-almost missed you guys.”

Richie had bounced the rest of the way into Bill’s room, flopping down at the foot of his friend’s bed. One hand moving to clutch at his chest, “Ouch Billiam, that smarts.”

Bill rolled his eyes but couldn’t hide the smile on his face even if he wanted to. As much as he loved spending time with Georgie and not having to go to school, he missed his friends. Leaning forward he shoved at Richie’s shoulder and the other boy mimed almost toppling off the foot of the bed. “Sh-shut up. Y-you know I’m ha-happy you c-c-came. Dick.”

Stan took this time to move towards Bill’s desk, sitting in the chair with his backpack in his lap so he could dig out everything he’d brought for Bill. “I also got a new spider-man comic.” He set that on top of the homework, shooting Richie a glare as he did, “You know, for fun.”

“Oh so you actually know what that is Staniel? I’m shocked.”

Stan flipped him off, then scooted the chair over to the side of the bed. It wasn’t until they were all gathered around Bill, Georgie included, that Richie finally glanced up in Eddie’s direction.

“Jesus Christ Eds.”

Eddie was pressed up against the furthest corner of the room, the front of his shirt up and over his mouth. “Not my name asshole.” Muffled by the fabric, brows furrowing over narrowed eyes.

“Eddie for fucks sake, he doesn’t have the plague.”

Eddie let his shirt drop for a moment, “Do you know that colds are still contagious even when symptoms aren’t present? That the virus can survive in the air and on surfaces for like days after someone sick has touched it? When was the last time this room was deep cleaned?” He tugged his shirt back over his mouth, “I can smell it.”

“S-sorry, E-eddie.” Bill muttered, “Y-you don’t ha-have to stay...”

“Don’t apologize Bill, he’s being ridiculous.” Richie glared, “You’re not going to get sick Eds you have like fifty gallons of hand sanitizer in your fanny pack.”

“Georgie’s been hanging out with Bill all week and he’s fine.” Stan said, ever the voice of reason. “It’s just one day Eddie, and he’s already over the worst of it.”

Eddie seemed to consider this, brown eyes darting from one face to the other. Richie could pinpoint the exact moment his mental gears reached a decision. His brows furrowed hard enough to wrinkle his forehead and a look of determination made his brown eyes darken slightly. Richie didn’t always get it, he knew how Eddie’s mom could be, but he’d come to recognize these moments as tiny rebellions. It might seem like nothing to him to sit next to his sick best friend, but to Eddie it was like he’d went off and gotten a tattoo or smoked a cigarette.

Slowly he let his shirt fall away from his face, tiny hands fisting at his sides as he edged closer to the bed.

“If I get sick and have to spend the entire fucking summer in the hospital I’m killing all of you.” He muttered, even as he climbed onto the bed beside Richie. “Except for Georgie.”

“Aye, way to stick it to Mrs. K. Spaghetti.” Richie grinned, bumping his shoulder against Eddie’s. “I promise I won’t tell her about this tonight when I go visit.”

“Beep Beep Richie.”

Richie smirked, but focused his attention on Bill. Things felt normal with all four of them together, like it was supposed to be. Even if Bill was sick in bed and they couldn’t do what they normally did, or go out, it was nice. They talked about school, about their parents, and about what happened with Bowers. As expected Eddie and Stan pushed for the details about what happened at the arcade and with Bill backing them up Richie couldn’t joke his way out of mentioning the knife. A fact that made Eddie’s eyes widen to almost comical

proportions and Stan and Bill to both curse under their breaths.

“Jesus, Rich.”

“What the f-fuck.”

“Nothing happened.” Richie insisted, rubbing at the back of his neck and ducking his head away from their stares.

“Bullshit nothing happened! Henry Bowers almost cut your tongue out.” Eddie looked and sounded horrified. At some point during the story he’d dug his inhaler out of his fanny pack and was now clutching it in his hands. Knuckles deathly white as he lifted it back to his face and took another frantic puff. “What the fuck. Seriously, what the fuck.”

“Eddie chill. I’m fine.” Then because he was tired of people freaking out about him, he focused on Bill instead. “Beverly said hi by the way, and that she hopes you feel better soon.”

“Be-beverly?” Bill’s face scrunched up in confusion.

“Yeah, Beverly Marsh. She was at my house.”

“W-what?” Bill’s face instantly went a bright shade of red. “Wh-why-why was she a-at you’re house?”

“She’s Will’s cousin, can you believe that?” He glanced at Stan and Eddie who looked equally as stunned about the news. Stunned enough to not ride his back about Bowers, which was a good thing.

“Seriously?” Eddie questioned, brows furrowing again like he was trying to remember if he’d known that or not.

“Well that explains why we saw her at his house yesterday.”

“Sh-she re-remembered m-m-me?” Bill’s eyes had widened, and he was sitting a little straighter.

“How could she not Big Bill?” Richie said with a smirk, feigning kissy noises at him. “That kiss man. Derry high’s stage hasn’t seen passion like that since.”

“B-beep beep R-Rich.”

Richie winked, the expression looking extra exaggerated with his magnified eyes, which got Bill to giggle.

At some point Bill’s mom came back from the store. She gave Bill some medicine, brought them all cookies and something to drink from downstairs, and they settled a little more comfortably into Bill’s room. Georgie left for a bit but came back with a board game and his remote controlled car, showing them all how good he was at driving it while Stan and Eddie set up the game. Richie got a chance to drive at some point and convinced Georgie to set up some action figures on the floor so he could ram into them. They laughed, they played, and at some point they settled down to watch a movie.

It was...peaceful.

## 10. float float float

### Notes for the Chapter:

I have been wanting to write this chapter since this idea came into my head.

It kind of surprised me how short it turned out, or that it decided to write out this way.

Either way here it is THE MOMENT, things are going to hopefully be heating up now u-u

There wasn't anything particularly different about that early summer day. Perhaps there was still a slight chill lingering in the air, a soft breeze whipping through the streets of Derry. A sleepy small town Saturday where the voices of kids playing in the streets echoed through quiet neighborhoods. Nor did anything unusual happen as the day slowly progressed and the bright summer sun steadily dropped closer and closer to the horizon. It was Derry at its finest: quiet and deceptively peaceful.

Perhaps later, with the gift of hindsight, some would say that there was an undercurrent in the air. An electric charge that crackled with foreboding and promised to turn that quaint summer day into something sour.

Truth is no one knew, and if they did then maybe they'd have done something different.

Maybe then Beverly Marsh and Will Beyer would have stayed the night at the Tozier house. Maybe Wentworth and Karen would have insisted, maybe Joyce would have called to say it was okay if they didn't come back tonight. Maybe Jonathan wouldn't have taken that extra shift at work.

Maybe Bill would have gone to play with Georgie in the backyard, sick or not. Maybe he would have sat on the porch or watched out the window. Maybe Richie, Eddie, and Stan would have stayed longer.



Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

The moon was clear and bright that night. A silver disk in a cloudless sky. No ominous storm clouds, no wind rattling barren claw-like branches. It wasn't an especially dark night, it was bright and glittering with promise. Fresh cool breezes carrying a hint of spring rains left over from the rainy season.

The Denbroughs realized something was wrong when Georgie's name echoed back and no response followed. Bill will remember later how he peeked out the window to watch his parents step out into the yard, their hands clasped over their mouths. He'll remember thinking Georgie was playing, that he'd burst from the bushes and break into giggles. He'll remember how he thought all of this was a game until he noticed the small remote controlled car half caught beneath a streetlight.

Then all he'll really remember is how the tires were still spinning.

It doesn't take long for the calls to be made and the flashing blue and red lights to dance down that quaint suburb. Neighbors drawn from their homes in slippers and bathrobes while the Denboroughs cling to each other on their front lawn. Vacant eyes unseeing as Jim Hopper's voice washes over them and the Derry Police Force swarms over their yard like ants on a fresh carcass.

A search is drawn up, but it's not Georgie they find when they comb the streets.

Someone is calling Hopper on the radio, saying a girl is unconscious. He thinks nothing of it until he recognizes the bright red hair and the too-fresh bruise, and the bikes. Two bikes. One kid.

His stomach swoops down to his toes, and then further still until he imagines it sinking into the earth beneath his feet.

"Beverly. Beverly, where's Will?" He's trying, he's really trying to keep steady, but he can see Joyce's face in the back of his mind. He can hear the sound of her crying and he doesn't want that. He wants to avoid that.

Beverly is dazed, she's limp like the bones have been sucked right out of her skin. Her head rolls onto his chest, her eyelids flutter.

He doesn't think he'll get an answer tonight. Thinks maybe he might not get one ever.

"Float..." She whispers, and her voice is a million miles away and shaking like she's being rattled around.

Hopper doesn't recognize what he feels at first.

Then he thinks...

*Oh, yeah. Fear.*

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Heads up that some of the tags might be changing or you might see some getting added in the future.

I'm a multishipper at heart and I tend to just let myself roll with whatever works best with the story, so those might change later or remain the same.

I doubt many of the big trigger tags are going to change, but if anything comes up that I think requires it, I'll add that in.

It's too early in the story to tell at this point but just thought I'd let you all know!

### **Author's Note:**

Woot! So first major change revealed: Joyce is Bev's aunt on her father's side. uwu

I'm a friendly idiot tbh so like here have my discord: they're GAZEBOS!#6273